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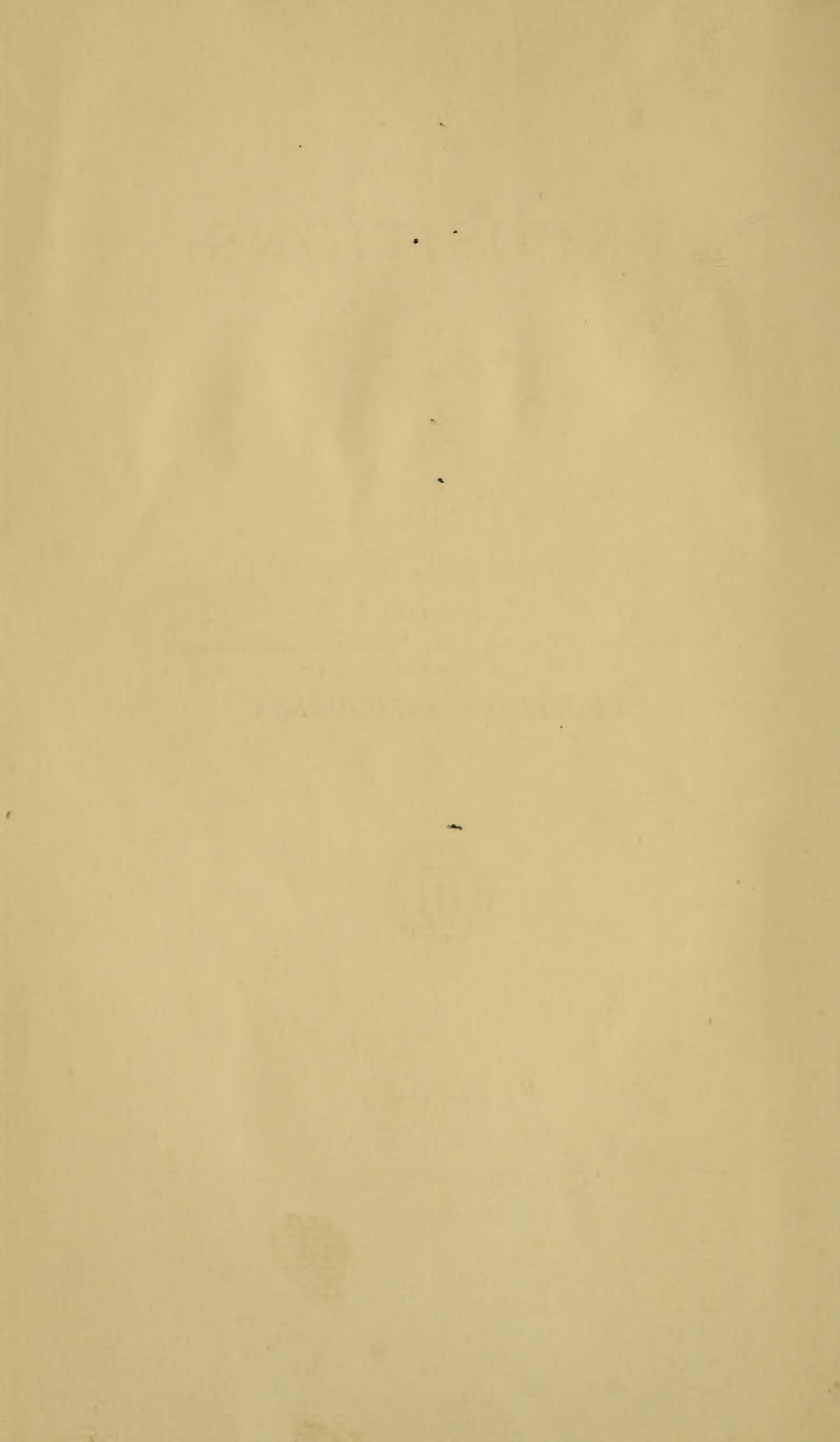
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Expositions

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EXPOSITORY DISCOURSES.



EXPOSITIONS

BY THE

REV. SAMUEL ✓ COX, D.D.

AUTHOR OF

"A COMMENTARY ON THE BOOK OF JOB," "BALAAM, AN EXPOSITION AND A
STUDY," "SALVATOR MUNDI," ETC. ETC.



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TO
ALFRED, BARON TENNYSON,
FROM WHOM I FIRST LEARNED TO TRUST
THE LARGER HOPE;
TO BELIEVE
THAT GOD IS LOVE INDEED,
AND LOVE CREATION'S FINAL LAW,
AND THEREFORE THAT
GOOD MUST SOMEHOW BE THE FINAL GOAL OF ILL:
THIS VOLUME IS, BY HIS PERMISSION,
GRATEFULLY INSCRIBED.



PREFACE.

"ALL good Protestants," said my friend Mr. Lynch, on one of those happy Sunday mornings on which it was my good fortune to hear him preach, "claim the right of private judgment as though it were their common but exclusive possession. But though we may all claim it, and make our boast of it, we must not use it. *No : you may have your gun ; and it may be a good gun : but you must not shoot with it, lest you should injure your neighbour, or even yourself.*" I have been found guilty of using this gun, of exercising the right which every good Protestant asserts for himself, and too many deny to their fellows. And hence I have been warned off from a certain preserve which had long been free to me, lest, having undeniably injured myself, I should also injure my neighbours.

Happily the world is wide, and he who must not shoot over one preserve may easily find another, without going

far away. I think I have found my new preserve here ; not very far away perhaps, but still far enough, I trust, to be beyond the range of those timid souls who can never hear a shot fired without suspecting mischief, and who do not pause to consider how many guns have been at work to provide their daily food : for why should we wish to annoy or alarm those who, while they boast their right of private judgment, never use it themselves, and cannot bear to see their neighbour use it ? These fresh woods and pastures new are my private possession ; no man need come on them save by his own goodwill : and those who come with goodwill will not, I hope, find much to offend them.

In plain words, here are some thirty expository lectures or discourses such as I used to contribute to *The Expositor* while I was its editor. Since that pleasant task was taken from me, I have received at least two hundred letters from the clergy and ministers of every branch of the Christian Church in Great and in Greater Britain—as well as from laymen of all sorts and conditions—telling me, often in terms that could not but deeply touch my heart, of help and comfort they had received from my expository work, and begging me to devise some form in which it might be carried on. Many of them assured me that they did not speak for themselves alone, but also for numbers of their brethren

whom they knew to be no less anxious on the latter point than themselves.

Now I am not so simple and unversed in affairs as not to have learned that such kindly assurances as these must be taken with a considerable discount, or that men easily believe that to be true which they wish to be true. But as for the last ten years I have almost daily received similar assurances to these, I have resolved to put them to a practical test. I cannot afford to publish books which do not sell. And from nothing do I shrink more sensitively than from obtruding myself on a reluctant audience. But if there be an audience, and they should prove the sincerity of their desire for such teaching and help as I can give by buying this book, I know of no reason why the volume should not become an annual one, at least for a few years to come. If no second volume should appear, my friends will understand that no such demand has arisen, and that I have taken the hint.

The only reason personal to myself alleged by the proprietors of *The Expositor* for withdrawing their confidence from me was, that I held and taught "the larger hope." Yet I never once argued, in the pages of that Magazine, for the ultimate salvation of all men, or permitted any one else to argue for it, though I did occasionally suffer an advocate of "the larger fear" to

adduce his arguments for that dreadful conclusion. I say this, neither as defending myself, nor as airing a grievance, but simply to explain the fact that the present volume contains a number of Discourses touching on that theme out of all proportion to the usual course of my ministry. I had by me several expositions of Scriptures in which that theme is involved, expositions which, to avoid hurting certain susceptibilities, I would not insert in the Magazine, but which I am free to use here. They are accompanied, however, by so many Discourses which dwell on the inevitable and punitive results of transgression, which so insist on the fact that, though God does not always pay the wages of sin in ready money, He does invariably pay them to the uttermost farthing, that I think no candid reader will charge me with "making light of sin." That is a very common charge against those who teach the mercy of God to be "more than all our sins;" and it may be deserved by as many as do not affirm the law of retribution as earnestly as they affirm the final triumph of good over evil. But it does not so much as touch those who when they speak of the mercy of God never dissociate it from his justice, but hold his justice to be the truest mercy; and who believe that in the end evil must be overcome of good, and all that is mortal be swallowed up of life, mainly because they must "keep his character clear,"

must believe that, because He is love indeed, love must be "creation's final law."

Nor am I without hope that at least some of my readers, when they see how naturally this great truth springs up from almost every page of Holy Writ, and how consistent it is with the whole scheme of Christian doctrine, may do something more than "faintly trust" that

good shall fall
At last—far off—at last, to all,
And every winter change to spring,

and every spring swell into the eternal summer of an eternal and all-conquering Love.

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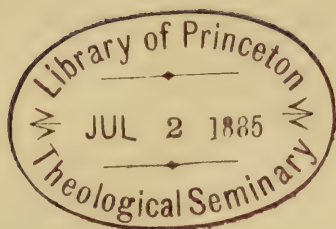
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I.

THE PURCHASE OF OPPORTUNITIES.

"Redeeming the time, because the days are evil."
EPHESIANS v. 16.

AS the year opens on us it is natural that we should recall the past and forecast the future. But if we are wise, we shall recall the past with a view to discover our faults, and forecast the future with a resolve to amend them. And that is a task in which we can hardly engage without receiving a new and deep impression of the immense value of time, the immense importance of using and improving it. At this season of the year, indeed, our strongest feeling is likely to be, if at least we have any discourse of reason, a profound sense of the brevity, the irrevocability, and, therefore, of the worth of time. It endureth but for a little while. Once past, it can never be recalled. And yet in these fleeting fading hours we are giving shape and colour to a life which lasts for ever. Of what grave moment is it, then, that we should redeem the time allotted to us, and turn it to the best account.

Such thoughts as these are natural and appropriate

to the day ; and St. Paul's words may help us to give them a new and wholesome turn, and save us from losing ourselves in idle reverie, or in that pensive flow of thought tinged with emotion, but not animated and imbued with it, which slackens rather than braces the energies of the soul.

"Redeeming the time, because the days are evil" is, however, but a poor and lame translation of St. Paul's graphic words. A better rendering would be, "*Buying up the opportunity, because the times are hard.*" But no mere translation can fully convey the idea he had in his mind. The picture or parable suggested by the Greek is this. Here stands a wise and wary merchantman, keen for spiritual traffic and gain. Like Milton, he has fallen on evil times ; on *bad* times, as men of business would say. The days drag slowly by, bringing him few means of moral culture, rare occasions in which he can trade with his talents and make them more. But, at last, as the caravan of Time moves tardily by, among the captives in its train he espies an opportunity such as his heart has long craved. He leaps at it, seizes it, *redeems* it, *i.e.*, pays a price for it and makes it his own.

This seems to have been the conception, the picture, in the Apostle's mind. And thus he defines *the Christian attitude toward Time*. Its days and hours are for the most part in bondage to vanity and corruption. We are to watch them as they pass by, keen and prompt to rescue them from their bondage, to set them free by devoting them to the service of God and

man, to purchase any precious opportunity they may bring with them, whatever it may cost us.

It lends new force to words not wanting in force if we mark the connection in which they stand. A great spiritual darkness brooded over Ephesus, through which Greek and Asiatic vices and superstitions moved hand in hand. St. Paul had just named some of them, as fornication, impurity, covetousness, filthiness of life, foolish talking and jesting, windy speculations, idolatry. He had bidden his converts have no fellowship with these unfruitful works of darkness, but bring forth the fruits of light in all righteousness and goodness and truth. He caps his exhortation with a rule which *good* men have still much need to bear in mind : "Take heed *how* ye walk strictly ;" *i.e.*, "Take heed, not only that ye do walk strictly or exactly, but also of what sort your strictness is : " "Take heed that you not only have a rule, but also that you have the true, the Christian rule." It is not enough to make the life *strict* : it must be *wisely* strict. It is not enough even that we set ourselves to do the will of the Lord : we must also take pains to understand what the will of the Lord is, and get our rule not from our own bitter tempers or narrow hearts, but from the teaching and example of Christ.

And if any ask, "What, then, is the will of the Lord?" the Apostle gives them, first of all, a very general reply, a reply that suggests only the spirit which is to govern their whole life. "*How* are we to walk strictly by the will of the Lord?" they ask; and he replies, "Not as unwise, but as wise," as men who look before and after ;

as men who think for themselves and pin their faith to no neighbour's sleeve ; as men who have regard not only to the prejudices of the weak, but also to the necessities of the strong ; as men who have no master but Christ.

To this general reply, however, which indicates a principle, St. Paul adds a string of maxims for their guidance in the church, the home, and the world. "Redeem the opportunity. Be not drunken with wine, but be ye filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. Wives, obey your husbands. Husbands, love your wives. Children, honour your parents. Parents, bring up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." These and the like are the maxims by which St. Paul would have those who walk strictly follow the Christian rule. According to him, therefore, the ideal life, the rule of Christian perfection, is not ascetical or monastic, but domestic. It does not impose austerities, penances, long prayers, vain repetitions. Those who would attain it are not to retire from the world, but to redeem the world by living in it on purer motives, with loftier aims, than the world supplies. They are to abide in their old relationships, and follow their old occupations, in a new spirit. The one difference between their former and their present life is to be that henceforth, "whatsoever they do, in word or in deed, they are to do all in the name of the Lord Jesus."

Among these "counsels of perfection" the very first is, "Purchase the opportunity, because the times are

hard." Were not those times hard, for one who aimed to live a Christian life, in which uncleanness and filthiness of life, covetousness and idolatry, were not accounted vices, but were the common habits of even the foremost men? When the days were so dark, and it was so hard to be good, was it not very necessary that the disciples of Christ should walk warily and strictly by the Christian rule? that they should be prompt and eager to seize the rare opportunities that came to them of understanding and enlarging their understanding of the will of God? It *was* necessary. It lends new force to St. Paul's words thus to connect them with the facts of his time and with the thoughts which he had already expressed.

But now, if we have ascertained the original meaning and application of our injunction, we can the better apply it to ourselves. For, as I have said, St. Paul here describes the attitude in which all Christian men should stand to time. We, no less than the Ephesians, should be as merchants eager to purchase every opportunity which the hostile days may carry in their train. As they defile before us, we are to be on the watch for the occasions of instruction and service which they hold in captivity, and which we can only redeem to our own use and profit at some cost of toil and self-sacrifice.

There are many reasons why we should take and maintain this attitude.

1. *Opportunities are only too apt to slip by unrecognized.* St. Paul bids us go through life "not as unwise, but as wise." But even the wisest of us is hardly wise enough

to recognize his opportunities till they are past. As a rule our days are samely and monotonous. To-day is as yesterday, and *not* much more abundant. There is not sufficient difference between them to awaken attention and inspire hope. We see no reason why we should either attempt or expect more to-day than on previous days. No doubt every day brings its own special opportunity, and repeats some of the opportunities we have had before. We have time for prayer to-day, time perhaps for studying the Word of God, time certainly for doing a little good. But time and means for these have come to us daily for many years. If we have never sprung at them and seized them before, why should we to-day? We are the slaves of habit; and we neglect our chance to-day because we have neglected it a thousand times before. Some day we shall wake up; and then, as we look back on the past, we shall bitterly rue our indifference and neglect. We shall see then that every day, as it went by, led some fair opportunity in its train which we might have redeemed; and that we might have grown rich unto God had we purchased and employed them. Then, too, in all probability, we shall waste many of the opportunities which still remain to us in vain regrets over the opportunities we have wasted in the past; and, in the end, slip into eternity with a long arrears of misspent time behind us.

Our days, moreover, come to us *masqued* for the most part, so that even when they bring us a great opportunity, we do not recognize its greatness at the time, and therefore do not seize upon it and improve it as we

should if we knew its worth. The current of our life is often turned by seeming trifles, which we assume to be quite incapable of seriously affecting it. No man can look back without recalling critical occasions which at the time he deemed to be of no importance. A random remark, the choice of this side of a street or that, the decision to enter or not to enter a certain house at a certain hour, a casual encounter with an unknown face, a foolish jest or a happily timed word—all these slight accidents of intercourse and neighbourhood were seeds out of which there has sprung a growth, good or bad, which now overshadows our whole life. As we recall them, how often and how vainly do we exclaim, "Would that I had known in that my day! Then how differently, how much more wisely would I have acted! Could I have foreseen the gravity of the occasion, how gladly would I have seized upon it and turned it to happier account!"

The truth is that, left to ourselves, we are *not* wise enough to live in such a world as this. And no wonder; for God did not intend to leave us to ourselves. With his usual eloquence, Jeremy Taylor has said: "Living as we do, in the midst of stern gigantic laws which crush everything down that comes in their way, which know no excuses, admit of no small errors, never send a man back to learn his lesson and try him again; living with such powers about us, unseen too for the most part, it does seem as if the faculties of man were hardly as yet adequate to his situation here." They are *not* adequate. When the crises of our life occur, when the

great opportunities come to us, which come so seldom, they are hidden from us by a multitude of subsidiary accidents and occurrences. We have, for example, to choose our occupation or profession while we are young, thoughtless, impetuous, much engaged with aims and pleasures which are of no real importance. When the choice is put before us, if we are lucky enough to get a choice, we may not have considered ourselves and our capacities: we may even be eager to get back to a game or a book, and, by a hurried careless assent to this proposal or that, we may bring on ourselves that supreme misery—a vocation for which we have neither liking nor capacity. So foolish or so unfortunate are we that, quite commonly, in making the great choices and decisions of life—in choosing our work, choosing our wife, choosing our church—we are influenced as much, and often more, by considerations which are of no moment, or by our craving for that which is of little moment, as by the grave and sacred realities that should determine our election. If there were no God above us, ruling even the accidents of life for our good, and working out the counsels of his will even when we let our wills drift on the tide of chance or drive before the waves of impulse, what would become of us all?

2. *These opportunities, critical as they are, when once they are gone, can never be recalled.* If we once suffer the hours to lead by the captive occasion, we can never thereafter recover it. Of course the fact is not so sad as it seems, but few facts seem so sad as the irrevocability of time. It passes so swiftly, our opportunity of using

it wisely is so brief, we are diverted from a wise use of it by so many temptations, that we sometimes feel as though in common fairness we ought to be allowed a second chance. We meant no harm ; we intended no neglect ; the occasion slipped by before we were well aware of its presence, before we had any conception of its gravity. Are we to suffer all our life long for that slight and momentary remissness ? And, in many cases, Experience replies, " Yes, you *are* to suffer. The occasion, once lost, can never be recalled. The task of that moment can never be achieved now, for every moment brings its own task, and a task that will tax all your strength." Says Plato, " It is quite clear, *quite clear*, that if a person lets the right moment for any work go by, it never returns. For the thing to be done does not choose, I imagine, to tarry the leisure of the doer."

The wise heathen is of one mind, you perceive, with the wise Apostle. Both affirm that the fugitive moment must be redeemed as it passes, or lost for ever. Our life is not like a placid stream on which, by steadfast endeavour, we may pull back against the tide. It is, rather, like a torrent which, rising on the mountains of Eternity, plunges the instant it has passed us into an unfathomable abyss. Our most strenuous effort only maintains us on the edge of the fall ; the stream is for ever sliding from under us ; and at last we too shall be swept over and be no more seen. Whatever chances we had yesterday, last week, last year, of shewing kindness or doing good, of fitting ourselves whether for earth

or heaven, are past for ever. All these opportunities are gone by. No sighs, no tears, no prodigal vows of amendment, will bring one of them back. We might have redeemed them ; but now they are captives for ever, or, rather, they are martyrs, and have perished in their captivity. Henceforth there is no redemption for *them*. We may weep over them, but we cannot recover them. All we can do is to redeem and improve the opportunities which remain to us. The past *is* past, and *must* bury its own dead. But the present is ours ; the future may be ours. Other occasions are with us, and are drawing near to us. And if we walk not as unwise but as wise, instead of vainly lamenting those which are gone, we shall eagerly seize on those which remain and make our profit of them. Our past neglects should lend new force and urgency to the Apostolic injunction, "Redeem the time," and make our obedience to it more prompt and vigorous. To-day we may listen to the Divine Voice to which yesterday we were deaf. To-day we may renounce those hurtful passions and lusts which ought to have been renounced long ago. To-day we may begin to grasp occasions as they rise, and to *do* the duty we have often thought of doing, and even talked of doing, but have not done. "Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is."

3. But if we set ourselves to seize and redeem present opportunities, we shall need to remember that *they are only to be redeemed at a certain cost*. In St. Paul's view these opportunities were as captives which the days led

by in chains ; and to redeem a captive we must pay a price. We can avail ourselves of no occasion of serving God and man except as we rouse ourselves to labour and self-sacrifice. One and a main reason why we have not improved past opportunities is that we were not willing to pay the price which would have made them ours. Disguised as they were, we had some inkling of their worth. We knew, for example, that it was our duty to "understand what the will of the Lord is." And there have been occasions when, had we cared to give ourselves a little trouble, we might have mastered the meaning of some difficult Scripture, or solved the riddle of some perplexing experience, or enlarged our conceptions of truth and duty. But we did not care to pay the price ; it was too much trouble to make the requisite effort : and so, though the opportunity was at our very door, we let it go by, the captive of unreturning Time.

Or, again, we knew in some respects what the will of the Lord was. We knew, for instance, that we should be calm and gentle when we were provoked, that we should meet injustice with justice, wrong with forbearance, sin with pity, evil with good, and render a blessing for a curse. When the dark hour came, with its special provocation or wrong, we knew how Christ the Lord would have acted in our place, how He wished us to act ; we knew how *He* would have redeemed the opportunity, and that He had sent us an opportunity of breathing his spirit and of bearing witness to Him. But we could not nerve ourselves to pay so great a price : the opportunity was too costly, too rare, for us : we yielded

to the temptation or the passion of the moment ; we met wrong with wrong, curse with curse, blow with blow, defiance with defiance. Instead of overcoming evil with good, we returned evil for evil. Instead of illustrating and proving the power of Religion, we proved how little power it had over our words and deeds. We lost our opportunity. It will never come back to us. It has gone, captive, into eternity, to bear witness against us.

And these sacred opportunities, like the Sybilline books, both rise in price and grow fewer every time we refuse to purchase them. If it be hard to subdue passion and the cravings of irregular desire to-day, it will be harder to-morrow, should we leave the hours of to-day unimproved. If it would cost us much to do what we know to be the will of the Lord to-day, it will cost us more every day we neglect our duty. A man who has long disobeyed the Divine will has difficulties in doing that will which, it may be hoped, that *we* can but faintly conceive. His polluted memory, his perverted and obstinate will, the force of sinful habit, the stings of impure desire, or even the mere custom of indifference to things unseen and eternal, turn the obedience, which should be his happiness, into mere labour and pain. How seldom do you see those who have long neglected the duties of Religion brace themselves to perform them ! Opportunities still come to them ; but the price at which alone *they* can redeem them is too costly, the labour involved in seizing upon them and making gain of them is too hard to be borne.

Our own observation and experience teach us, then,

that no opportunity can be redeemed without money and without price ; and that the longer we neglect our opportunities the more costly is the work of their redemption.

4. Finally, the Apostle warns us *that when the times are hard, we should be the more eager to redeem the opportunities they bring us.* "Redeem the opportunity *because* the times are evil." And, indeed, hard and evil times bring opportunities of a special value, not only because they are scarce, but also because they have a great intrinsic worth. Nay, more, hard times, sorrowful times, times of temptation and difficulty, are themselves opportunities of pre-eminent value. Then, if ever, we have a chance of shewing of what stuff we are made, of testing and proving the sincerity, the genuineness, of our religious life. It is easy to be good-tempered when things go to our mind. It is easy to be genial and courteous when we get our own way. It is easy to be calm when we are not provoked, suave when we are not contradicted, virtuous when we are not tempted, contented when we have enough and to spare, brave when there is no danger, meek when we are not smitten, just and unrevengeful when we are not wronged. The difficulty begins when the bad times come. That which really proves whether or not we have the mind of Christ, that which determines the power and worth of our religion is—temptation. If we can requite evil with good while we are still smarting under an ill turn, if we can be unrevengeful when we are gravely wronged, meek when the blow falls, gracious when we are displeased, content in adversity, patient under loss, kind and generous when we *cannot* get our

own way and have our own will—then indeed we may conclude that we are walking by the Christian rule, that we both understand what the will of the Lord is and do it.

Too often we forget that every provocation, wrong, loss, hardship, is an opportunity to be redeemed ; that it is sent by God even though it comes from men ; that He tasks our strength to test our character, to teach us what we really are, to wake us up from any delusion into which we have fallen about ourselves. We *may* be weak, and yet think ourselves strong ; impure, and yet think ourselves holy : we may be of the unwise, yet deem ourselves to be wise. Every trial which hard times bring *is* a trial ; *i.e.*, it is a test in which we are put to the proof and our true quality is revealed. Every such trial virtually says to us, “ Here is another opportunity of shewing your trust in God, of proving that you are of one mind and will with Him. How will you take it ? Will you redeem it, or let it go by ? ” If we take it as from God, and set ourselves to use and improve it, if we suffer and are strong, if in the teeth of temptation and provocation we are pure, gentle, meek, kind, we may know that we have received grace from God and that we have not received it in vain. But if in these crises of our life we do not walk by the Christian rule ; if we are quick to resent wrong and hot to revenge it, if we sorrow as those who have no hope, if in earthly care we do not find a heavenly discipline, if bereavement itself sets us on thinking more of ourselves instead of more of others ; if, in short, we desert the Christian standard so soon as the enemy

enters the field, we may well fear that we have not the spirit of Christ and are none of his. The hard times came, with the fair precious opportunity in their train, and we were so occupied in bemoaning the hardness of our lot that we did not even recognize the opportunity, much less redeem it.

Let us be wiser merchantmen than that, my brethren. When the dark days come, let us walk warily, and be on the watch. This is our opportunity, the very opportunity for which we flatter ourselves that we have been waiting. Let us so think of it, and so accept it. Let us at last "understand what the will of the Lord is" in permitting wrong, sorrow, loss to befall us; that He is putting us to the test, giving us occasion to prove the sincerity of our trust in Him, the steadfastness of our obedience and love. Let us redeem the time; and, by redeeming the time, lay hold on eternal life.

Let us enter on the new year with the resolve that "Redeem the opportunity" shall be not our motto only, but our rule. For then we shall find opportunities of knowledge and growth and service in our very trials; and however bad the times may be, we shall know how to turn them to good account.

II.

THE SANITARY ORDER OF HUMAN LIFE.

“Wheresoever the carcase is, there will the vultures be gathered together.”—MATTHEW xxiv. 28.

IF, struck either by its wit or its weight, you consult any good commentary on this verse, you will be told that it contains a proverb in common use among the Jews. You will also be told that the word translated “eagles” includes all birds of rapine; and that, as eagles do *not* feed on carrion, it should here be rendered by vultures, which *do*. You will be told still farther that a whole line of scholars, from Chrysostom down to Calvin, took the verse to imply that Christ Himself was “the carcase,” on which all saints, martyrs, and angels feed; but that as this interpretation makes our Lord compare Himself to carrion, and reduces those who love Him to those who prey upon Him, no person of good taste can possibly accept it. And you will be told that another series of scholars, from Dr. Lightfoot to John Wesley, held the Jews to be the carcase, and took our Lord to mean that wherever the Jews might be, there the Roman legions, “whose ensign is the eagle,” would pursue and prey upon

them : but that this interpretation is also inadmissible, because not true to the facts of the case. But if you then ask, as surely it is but natural to ask, What *does* this proverb mean on the lips of Christ? what great truth does it teach? what general law does it affirm? unless you have better commentaries than any I possess, you will get no clear and satisfactory reply, no reply that will help you to find in the verse a general principle of grave value and importance.

Yet the words are, obviously, very solemn and pregnant words. They form one of the culminating points of a very solemn and pregnant discourse. Read them in their connection, and you cannot but feel that they must have a wide and far-reaching significance, however vague your conception of their meaning may be, and even though you have formed no conception which can be put into words. And to most readers of the New Testament, I suppose, this proverb does mean very little for the present, so little that they attach no clear and definite thoughts to it, much less any deep and illuminating principle or law.

Yet there is nothing in the mere words, or in the mere figure of speech, to perplex and baffle you. You know how in Eastern lands, if any beast of burden falls and dies, though the moment before the whole horizon may have been clear, with not a bird in sight, a stream of vultures suddenly appears to wrangle over the unexpected feast. You know how on any tropical ocean, if a carcass be thrown overboard, though at the moment there may not be a speck in the sky, the albatross and

other birds of mighty wing appear as if by magic, and scold and fight over the welcome repast. And, as you read the verse with this knowledge in your mind, you understand that our Lord applies this familiar image of the carcase and the birds of prey to the judicial and retributive forces of human history, and intends to illustrate some law or principle by which they are governed. But what that law is you do not see ; and the commentators do not help you to see it.

Now I am very far from supposing that I have fathomed, or that as yet any man is likely to fathom, the full significance of these words. But there are two clear thoughts which I believe we may attach to them, two definite principles which I think they were intended to illustrate, and which spring out of them so naturally that, the moment they are stated, they will, I expect, commend themselves to your minds. Perhaps they were too natural and obvious for the commentators to take any notice of them.

I think, then, they were intended to teach us, first, that a certain *order* underlies the events of human history ; and, secondly, that this order is a *sanitary* order.

I. In a very remarkable way our Lord anticipates the modern doctrine of the orderly sequence of events in human history. He had been speaking, more in detail than He was wont to speak, of the wars and rumours of wars, the accumulating miseries and calamities, which were to precede the consummation of the age in which He lived, and the opening of the new age of peace and

concord which He came to set up. And as He speaks He perceives that the question still present to the minds of his disciples was that which they had asked at the first (Verse 3), "Tell us *when* shall these things be?" In full accordance with the thought of their time, they conceived that the dire events which He foretold might happen at any moment, that they had no necessary connection with acts and events which had preceded them; that they depended simply on some mysterious, if not capricious determination of the Divine Will which had no ground in reason, and could be referred to no general law. That all things happen according to a pre-established order, that the sequences between cause and effect which obtain in the physical world also hold good in the moral world, and mould the events of the human story; that the law of retribution governs and shapes the whole varied scene of human life, so that men, and nations, and churches inevitably receive the due recompense of their deeds—this was a thought as foreign to the mind of the ordinary Jew as to that of the Gentile. Gentile and Jew alike conceived of the natural world as simply the manifestation and outcome of a supernatural Will; and they conceived of this Will as interfering with the natural order when and as it would, observing no rule, bound by no laws, determined by motives which were shrouded in an impenetrable darkness. It is only, indeed, within the last few centuries that men have settled into the conviction that even the natural order of the physical world is one which cannot be broken, though its action may be guided and controlled whether by

the will of man or by the will of God. It is only within the last few years that a successful endeavour has been made to shew that the moral order of the universe is as inflexible as the physical order, and the reign of law has been extended to the fluctuating and variable wills of men. It is a discovery of our own time that the events of history are controlled by forces for which we may find a formula, by laws some of which at least we may ascertain and tabulate, though many of them still lie beyond our reach.

And, therefore, it is all the more wonderful to hear from the lips of our Lord a generalization which might have fallen from the lips of a modern man of science. Our modern philosopher might not have thrown his formula into a parabolic or poetic shape ; he might have been content to affirm that what men call "judgments" are simply particular instances of that law of retribution which governs the whole round of human life. But when our Lord declares that "*wheresoever* the carcase is, there the vultures gather," He makes the selfsame affirmation, but makes it in a form so telling and picturesque that it fixes itself in our memory and imagination as no merely abstract statement could do. "*When* shall these things be ? *When* shall these calamities fall ?" ask the disciples, as though they might happen whenever they liked, or whenever God liked, without reason and without cause ; as though they might fall on any man, any generation, any race, innocent or guilty. But in his reply our Lord teaches them that the catastrophes of history do not come by

chance, do not spring from caprice; that the effect always has a cause, that judgment follows only on the heels of offence. Starting from a particular instance, He lays down a general, an universal, law: "*Wheresoever* the carcase is, *there*, but only there, do the vultures gather together." It is corruption that calls for judgment, and never calls in vain. It is guilt that ensures punishment. It is a law—the law of retribution—which is enforced and illustrated on every dark page of human experience.

Now this anticipation of a modern discovery, this application of law to history, is valuable to us in many ways. It enhances our conception of the wisdom of Him who spake as never man spake. It lends new point and force to a moral often drawn from the facts of life, and warns us that, since retribution is not arbitrary and capricious, but necessary and inevitable, we cannot possibly escape the due punishment of our sins, whether by any slippery ethical evasion or by any theological artifice. But it is specially valuable, I think, because it warrants us, if warrant be needed, in looking for instruction and warning *everywhere*, on every leaf of the human story. Not in Judea alone, but throughout the world, "*wheresoever* the carcase is, there the vultures gather." If only we have eyes to read it aright, to see the Divine Will and the Divine laws at work in it, the history of the kings of England is just as instructive to us as the history of the kings of Israel, the decline and fall of the Roman Empire as the siege and capture of Jerusalem, the reformation wrought by Luther as the

revival of religion under Hezekiah, the French revolution as the rupture between the ten Hebrew tribes and the two. No historical event is without its religious lesson for us, if only we can trace it to its moral cause ; no human life, if only we can read its illustrations of that law-abiding Providence which watches over us as carefully as it did over the Jews, and shapes our rough-hewed ends for us as it shaped theirs.

I do not deny that the Hebrew story is so written as no other history is, written by men of God who were moved to shew and bent on shewing us its religious significance and intention ; and that, for the religious mind, therefore, this story must always be more "profitable" than others. All I affirm is that the story of every man, and of every race, *has* a religious intention and significance ; and that, would we observingly distil it out, we should find it no less illustrative of God's ways with men. And if it be true that "*wheresoever* the carcase is, there the vultures gather," it surely must be true that, whether the corrupt nation or church which invokes the law of retribution to its own hurt be ancient or modern, Jewish or Gentile, it brings us the same lesson, and is pressed home upon us by the same terrible sanctions, as the whole world has agreed to find in the rejection of the Jews and the destruction of their commonwealth.

II. This, then, is the first thought suggested by our Proverb—that the events of history do not happen by chance, in an accidental haphazard way, but that there is an order in them, a logical sequence, a law which binds

cause to effect ; and that this law is, as indeed all *laws* must be, universal in its scope, and determines the fate of every man and of all the kindreds of men. And the second thought is, that this order is a *sanitary* and beneficent order. That the vultures gather wheresoever *the carcase* is, and gather to consume it, is clearly for the health of the world ; for, unconsumed, the carcase would but rot and fester and infect the air ; by its infection turning the very breath of life into a minister of death. All the birds that prey on carrion are *scavenger* birds. Most of the scavengers, from the vulture of the East down to the flies which cleanse our shops and rooms from every morsel of corruption, are a little loathsome to us : yet how much we owe them ! We owe them nothing short of health and life. A world without scavengers would soon become a stinking sepulchre.

And the miseries and calamities which wait on guilt, the reformatations by which the gross and corrupter elements of a church are eliminated, the revolutions by which an effete and decaying civilization is destroyed, the wars by which an empire founded on violence and fraud is broken up, or an utterly depraved and worthless race is exterminated—all these are the vultures, the scavengers, of the moral world. Health, life, freedom, progress, would be impossible without them. And hence our Lord teaches us to look upon them as God's ministers for our good. All life is conditioned by death ; all advance, by destruction. Old things must pass away if all things are to become new. Even the kingdom of peace had to come with a sword. And when Christ

was speaking to his disciples of the time when his kingdom should come with power, when one age should be consummated and another begun, He had to warn them that the transition would be attended with tribulations under which the hearts of the very elect would all but faint, and would altogether faint unless they believed that the vultures of God came only to destroy that which must be destroyed if the world were to be raised from death into life.

Wordsworth did but throw this thought into a new form in a line which gave grave offence at the time, and is still a stumbling-block to his less thoughtful and experienced readers. Had he been content to sing,

That God's most dreaded instrument
In working out a pure intent
Is man—arrayed for mutual slaughter,

no sound of dissent or censure would have been heard. But when he added the line,

Yea, Carnage is his (God's) daughter,

all the easy good people who decline to face the more tragic facts of life were simply horrified and bewildered. Yet the vulture, with his carrion beak, is no less God's creature than the bird of paradise or the sweet-voiced nightingale, and fulfils a much more necessary function than they. But for the scavengers we should not live to listen to the singing birds. And who that with adequate knowledge reflects on the course of human history can doubt that it is by the wars and strifes which have desolated the world that the world has been quick-

ened into new and larger and happier forms of life? The time *may* have come when all our revolutions should be peaceful revolutions, and all our strifes bloodless conflicts between men who are seeking the common welfare in different ways. But does the world owe nothing, does it not owe much, to the crusades which drove back the Turk, to the Reformation wars against the Roman tyranny, to the French revolution, to the American revolt, and even to our own struggles against the pride and selfishness of the English barons and kings?

But the most consolatory thought suggested by our Lord's words is this: He teaches us to look on all the strifes and discords of Time as parts of that great conflict between good and evil in which the ultimate defeat of evil is assured. The calamities and miseries to which men lie open, from the least to the greatest, are intended to remove only that which must be removed if we are to live in health and peace. "Wheresoever the *carcase* is there the scavengers are." And if the carrion is everywhere, on sea as well as on land, in the chamber as well as in the forest or the street, so also are the scavengers. Vulture and fly have the same function, do the same sanitary and beneficent work. Wherever there is evil, there also is good, to replace the evil as well as to overcome and destroy it. Whether it be the corruptions of our own heart which breed strife and misery within us, or whether it be the carnal lusts and corrupt desires, the selfish aims and tyrannous spirit, of large bodies of men in the world or in the Church which breed strife and misery on a larger scale—that misery and strife are

the vultures of God. It is their high mission, repulsive though they seem, to destroy all that is evil, corrupt, deadly; and to destroy it not only that the air may be freed from poisonous infections, but also in order that all that is good, pure, vital, fruitful, may have room to grow and thrive. And what greater consolation could we have than this, that the very miseries of men are messengers of the Divine Mercy, and come to give health and life rather than to destroy, since they come only to destroy that which is fatal to life and health?

Some of you might think I was pushing out beyond the bounds of this Proverb, and inviting you to speculate too curiously, were I to ask you to mark that even the carrion, even that which is consumed by the vultures, is also *assimilated* by them, and raised at least from absolute death and corruption into the lower forms of organized life. The analogy is obvious, and seems to hint that death itself may be a passage to new life even to that in us which dies, or to those of us who seem to perish. But I will not pursue the analogy; I will not even ask you to pursue it for yourselves, since it would not be wise to build a truth so great and solid on metaphors and hints. It will be enough if you have learned to connect two clear and helpful thoughts or principles with the words before us; so that, whenever you read them again, they may remind you, first, that there is a logical order in all the events of human life; and, then, that through the wisdom of the All-Wise, through the mercy of the All-Merciful, this order is a sanitary order, conducive to life and health, progress and peace.

III.

THE DIVINE ROOT OF THE HUMAN PEDIGREE.

“Adam, who was the son of God.”—LUKE iii. 38.

THE pedigree of our Lord, as given by the Evangelist of the Gentiles, ends with a wonderful leap, a leap from earth to heaven. Noah was the son of Lamech, Lamech the son of Methuselah, Methuselah the son of Enoch, Enoch of Jared, Jared of Mahalaleel, Mahalaleel of Cainan, Cainan of Enos; Enos was the son of Seth, Seth was the son of Adam, Adam was the son of—*God*. There is no bolder word in Scripture, none that strikes us with a deeper surprise and awe. The nearest approach to it is, perhaps, Habakkuk’s abrupt but splendid inference from the eternity of God to the immortality of man: “Art not *thou* from everlasting? *We* shall not die.”

Most of us have doubtless wondered at times why, when space was so valuable, Luke should have inserted this long pedigree in his Gospel, “this barren list of names.” But the pedigree is of immense value, if for nothing else, yet for this, that it connects the second Adam with the first Adam, that it places a son of God

at either end of this list of names ; that it makes *us* out to be the children of God both by nature and by grace, by birth and by second birth. For, of course, if Adam was the son of God, we are all the children of God, since we are all children of Adam ; there is a divine element in our nature as well as a human element, a capacity for life and holiness as well as a liability to sin and death. God made man good, and even "very good," for He created him in his own image, after his own likeness. And though Adam marred that image when he fell, he did not annihilate it ; though he may transmit to us the wrong ply or bias which he himself took when he transgressed the law of his own being, he also transmits to us the original love of that which is good, and the tendency toward it, which he derived from God.

This, indeed, I believe to be the secret of that double or divided nature of which we are conscious, of which every man is conscious. It is this which explains how it comes to pass that even in the worst of men we find something good, and something bad even in the best. That which is good in us we derive from God, our true Father, the sole source and fountain of good ; that which is evil in us we inherit not from Adam only, but from all our earthly parents.

Nowhere do we find a more striking and pregnant statement of the fact that God is the Father of all men than here ; but this fact is none the less constantly affirmed in Scripture. When, for example, St. Paul stood on Mars' Hill, did he not assure the light and giddy Athenians, who rejected his gospel—did he not

assure even these sinners of the Gentiles, that what certain of their own poets had told them was true? that they *were* the offspring of God, and that *in Him*, not in Adam or the devil, they lived and moved and had their being? And if that was true of them, is it not also true of us, and of all men? How say some, then, that there is nothing good in man, that our nature is evil, only evil, and that continually; and that, till our nature be renewed, our very virtues lose their quality and are nothing more than "splendid sins"? Is not that to say that we are the offspring of Adam, and *not* the offspring of God. Is it not to assume that Adam is stronger than God, and does more to determine our state and destiny? Is it not to forget that Adam himself was a son of God, and that he must therefore transmit to his children the nature he received from God, however that nature may have been modified, limited, thwarted, by the sin which cost him Paradise? Is it not to make man more, and more potent, than God, and evil more, and more potent, than good?

These are questions which we cannot but ask as we read the Bible and think over its teaching. They are questions which we are provoked to ask with a certain indignation and resentment when theologians talk to us of the *total* depravity of man. Experience compels us to say, Men are *not* wholly depraved; for even in the worst of them there is something good. The Bible affirms that all men are the children of God, and that He loves them all: and how *could* they be his children, how could He love them, if there were nothing good in

them, nothing to love? The very Gospel forbids us to believe that human nature is only and altogether evil: for, if it were, how could the pure Son of God have taken that nature upon Him?

And yet, in the crudest and most damnatory statement of human depravity, there is a certain truth which it behoves us to recognize and to lay to heart. It is quite true that, however good we may be, there is no goodness in us which we can claim for our own. "*In me*," said St. Paul—and which of us cannot say it for himself?—"in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing." Our goodness, such as it is, and whether it come to us by nature, or by inheritance from our parents, or by faith in the Son of God, is all of God, who made us in his own image, who gave our parents every good gift which they possessed, and who is ever striving to redeem us out of all evil by the ministries of his grace. No confession of sin and personal unworthiness is too profound and exhaustive, therefore, for the best of men to take upon his lips. And yet such a confession would be most misleading were we to infer from it that there is nothing good in him. The sin is his, for God did not make him sin; the goodness is God's, for it is God who has made him good. The Prodigal Son did not lose his proper nature, nor even his standing as a son, much less his father's love and pity, when he wandered into the far country; though a prodigal, he was still a son. But he did lose all the comfort of his father's love, all sense of sonship, all hope of peace. Still a son, his father's house and heart still open

to him, he felt that he had no home, that he was no longer a son, that he had sunk below the level of a hired servant; and nothing more became him than the humble heart-broken confession with which he flung himself at his father's feet, and prayed that on any terms he might be re-admitted to the home from which he had been so eager to escape.

And it is even so with us. The Bible everywhere tells us that, however sinful we may be, God is still our Father, and that He has made an atonement for our sins; that He is ever seeking us, and seeking to recall and redeem us unto Himself; that He is ever with us, with us as a living Lord and Ruler and Guide, with us as a quickening and renewing Spirit. These are the facts which the Bible announces on every page. And if they *are* facts, our unbelief cannot change, much less abolish, them. In Bishop Butler's simple but weighty phrase, "Things *are* what they are, and their consequences will be what they will be." The truth of facts does not depend on our faith in them. The law of gravitation was a law before Newton discovered it, and remains a law let who will doubt or disbelieve it. And God *is* our Father even though we do not know it, and must behave Himself as our Father even though we refuse to submit to his will. He *is* the Lord and Ruler of our lives even though we are unaware of his rule, or refuse to have Him to reign over us. He *is* our Saviour even though we should never have heard of his salvation, or will not let Him save us. He *is* a quickening and renewing Spirit, prompting us through our reason, con-

science, and all good affections, even though we rarely yield to his gracious impulses and monitions.

But though these great and happy facts do not depend on our recognition of them, though we cannot change or abolish them do what we will, we can change their incidence, their bearing, upon us. If you do not know or will not believe that He is your Father, God does not cease to love you, indeed, but you lose all the comfort of his love, and even compel that love to take on forms of severity and rebuke. If you do not know or will not believe Him to be your Saviour, He does not cease to labour for your salvation, but you may remain in your sins. If you do not know or will not believe that He is the Lord and Ruler of your life, you do not depose Him from his throne, but you may only too easily slip into ways which are not good, and find yourself confronted with the penalties of his broken law, instead of being sustained and enriched by the results and rewards of obedience. If you do not know or will not believe that He is near you and with you as a quickening Spirit, you do not put an end to his renewing ministry, but you may and must lose the immediate benefit of it.

And this is precisely what many do—what, indeed, we have all done at some period, what even the best of us is too apt to do even now. They recognize the sensuous facts of life. They see and believe that they have appetites, cravings, desires, which may be gratified. But they do not believe, and hence they do not see, that God is their Father, Redeemer, Lord ; that, because He has made them for Himself, He has put

eternity into their hearts, and that their hearts can know no rest until they rest in Him. That is to say, they do not recognize the spiritual facts of life ; and hence these higher facts do not exert their proper influence and control over them. They walk after the flesh, and not after the spirit ; and, having once set out on that path, they commonly become more and more carnal and sensuous in their aims and desires—appetite growing by what it feeds upon—and less and less spiritual. In fine, they do not recognize, and hence they do not act upon, the supreme facts of life ; and so they lose its supreme joy and blessedness,

There is, therefore, an immense difference between the animal and the spiritual man ; between the man who does and the man who does not recognize and act upon the supreme facts of human life ; between the man who adapts himself to his whole environment, and the man who ignores its ruling elements and conditions, or will not adapt himself to them. The one has a Father in heaven, and knows it, and gets in some measure—in the measure of his faith—the comfort of his Father's love and bounty and protection. He not only has a Saviour, but accepts his salvation, and is in some measure—again in the measure of his faith—delivered from the bondage of sin into the love and service of righteousness. He has and knows that he has a living Lord and Ruler ever with him and for him ; and in some measure—still in the measure of his faith—he trusts in Him and obeys Him, and is so far forth freed from the yoke of care and fear. Yet, because neither his knowledge nor his faith

is perfect, he too often lapses under the dominion of the flesh and the world, loses touch with God or loses hold of Him, and carries himself as if he had no Father, no Redeemer, no Lord.

On the other hand, the natural or animal, or carnal man, though he does not recognize or does not believe what God is to him, does not cease to have a Father in heaven who is ever seeking to reveal his love to him ; a Redeemer who is ever seeking to deliver him from his sins ; a ruling and quickening Spirit who is for ever making him ashamed of the very sins he commits, and prompting him to turn and live a truer better life. Hence at times, when he is deeply moved, he yields more or less reluctantly, or more or less willingly, to the promptings of the Divine Spirit, carries himself like a child of God, achieves acts of virtue and rises to deeds of kindness and self-denial which make us wonder at him, and which even set him wondering at himself.

But in neither case is that which is good to be attributed purely to the man himself ; and in neither case is the evil that men do, saint and sinner alike, to be attributed to God. It is because *every* man is a child of God, because the Divine Name stands at the top of the human pedigree, that even the worst of men feels a Divine constraint laid upon him at times, yields to a Divine impulse, and so does that which is just, pure, lovely, kind. It is because even the best of men is but a man at the best, and forgets that he is a son of God, and refuses to yield to the Divine influence, that he falls into sins which, as he himself is the first to confess,

render him guilty before God, and even move him to account himself the chief of sinners.

Now it is here, it is in these facts of our relation to God and of his relation to us, that we find the key to all the phases of our moral experience, and, above all, to that problem of a double or divided consciousness by which the thoughtful of every age have been perplexed—his study of which threw St. Paul into an agony of spirit of which we can still find traces in Chapter vii. of his Epistle to the Romans. We need not and we must not confuse the believer with the unbeliever, as though there were no difference between them, in order to account for the evil there is in good men, or for the good there is in bad men. There is the widest of all differences between them. We need only remember that we are all sons of Adam, and that Adam was the son of God. He must, therefore, have transmitted to us the nature he derived from God, as well as the lower nature, or lower inclinations and tendencies of nature, which he framed for himself. God is *our* Father if the father of us all was God's son. And though the man who does not believe in Him is a man who, on the whole, lives in the lower and more sensuous elements and regions of the nature we share with him, we need affect no surprise at finding that no child of God is wholly left to himself, that his Father and Saviour and Lord is still with him, still striving with and impelling him toward that which is good, and that not always nor altogether in vain. And though the man who believes in God is a child of God in the still higher sense that

he recognizes and accepts God as being his Father, Redeemer, and Lord, though on the whole he works together with God for his own good, we need feel no surprise—if at least we remember that he too is a man, a son of Adam as well as a son of God—at finding that now and again he is unfaithful to his own faith, untrue to his own deepest convictions, and rises from his falls and sins with a profounder sense of guilt than any “sinner” ever knew.

In the light of our text, then, even the most perplexing facts of our inward experience grow a little more clear to us. So also does the deepest teaching of the New Testament—the philosophy which underlies the teaching of our Lord and of the two greatest of his interpreters, St. Paul and St. John.

That teaching may be briefly summed up thus. Christ is the Eternal Word by whom all things were created and made, by whom, therefore, Adam, or Man, was created and made. Hence Christ is, as St. Paul calls Him, the head of every man. It is *in Him* that we live and move and have our being. He is in us, we are in Him. He, therefore, is nearer to us than our own flesh. He can enable us to conquer and rule the flesh, with all its cravings and lusts. He is the very Life of our life. To believe in Him is not only to believe in One who was, but in One who *is*—in a living Lord, an active and abiding Saviour. We may not know, we may not believe, that He is the true root of our being, the true Lord of our life. But our unbelief cannot change this fact, any more than it can change the fact that God is

our Father. All that our ignorance or unbelief can do is to deprive us of the support and comfort of this most happy and sustaining fact. But if we do believe in Him as the Life indeed, then, as He Himself has said, He is in us, we in Him, *and we know it*: He in us, the pledge of immortality, the hope of glory; we in Him as the ground of our being, the strength and joy of our life.

Then, too, we begin to understand all those difficult and perplexing passages in the writings of St. Paul which declare our essential oneness with Christ; the passages which affirm that, when He died, we died in Him; that because He rose, we live; that because He ascended up on high, we sit with Him in heavenly places, our life being hid with Christ in God. Because He made our nature, He could take our nature. Because we all spring from Him, whatever He has done or does as surely affects us as what Adam was and did affects our nature and position. The second Adam, He was nevertheless before the first Adam, and called Him into being. Hence *He* could die for all. Hence He lives for all, and we all live in and by Him. Hence if by the offence of one death came on all, much more did life come to all by the obedience of One.

In short, all the sentences in the New Testament which have sounded most mystical and obscure, and which may have seemed too good to be literally true, become true and plain to us so soon as we understand that Adam was the son of God, and that Adam was made by Him without whom nothing was made, and

apart from whom nothing can subsist. For then we apprehend that, in the most literal sense, we are *in* Christ, that our very subsistence is a proof that we are in Him, and He in us, since we should cease to subsist but for Him. We apprehend that the very life we derive from Adam comes to us from Christ, since Adam derived his being from Christ. And we apprehend that so soon as we recognize this fact, and turn to Christ in faith and love as the sole Source and Spring of our life, all the blessedness of a true and eternal life in Him becomes ours.

Finally, the practical outcome of these thoughts is most welcome and most precious to as many of us as love life and desire to see good. For, however weak and sinful we may be, we have not, as we sometimes fear, to persuade God to enter into a fatherly relation to us, and to begin to love us. He *is* our Father ; He *does* love us. Nor have we, as we still oftener fear, to ask Him to redeem us from the yoke and tyranny of our sins. He *has* redeemed both us and all men, once for all, by the incarnation and sacrifice of Jesus Christ our Maker, our Head, and therefore our Representative. We have only to recognize existing and accomplished facts. We have only to *believe* that He is our Father, has been our Father ever since we had any being, and can never cease to be our Father. We have only to *accept* the salvation He has wrought, and which stands waiting for us and urging itself upon us. We have only to *believe* that He is in us—to be our Guide, our Ruler, to quicken and renew our spirits ; that He is in very

deed always seeking us and striving with us, turning us away from evil, turning us towards righteousness and peace—and the work is done. Forgiveness is ours ; righteousness is ours ; peace is ours ; in the full measure of our faith in Him as our Father, Redeemer, Lord. In so far as they are imperfectly ours, it is because our faith in Him is yet imperfect, imperfect in scope or imperfect in activity ; because we do not fully realize the facts of our spiritual condition, or because we are not true even to our imperfect apprehension of those facts. There need be, there can be, no change in God, or in the Son of God ; it is *we* in whom a change is wanted. *They are.* *They* have done, they are doing, all that we can desire them to be or do. And so soon as we know that, and believe it, *we* shall become all that we desire to be, and receive all that we long to enjoy.

IV.

THE CHILDREN OF WRATH.

“And were by nature children of wrath, even as the others.”
EPHESIANS ii. 3.

WHEN Philip said to Jesus, “Lord, *shew* us the Father, and it is all we want,” he may have had some dim longing in his heart for such a vision of the Divine Glory as that vouchsafed to Moses on the Mount; but, I suspect, his ruling meaning was, “Only convince us that God is in very deed our Father, and we shall have nothing more to ask or desire.” Yet this was precisely what Jesus had done, though Philip knew it not. In the Lord’s Prayer, in the Sermon on the Mount, in reasoned discourse and in picturesque parables, notably in the parable of the Prodigal Son, He had taught them that God is the Father of all men, of the evil as well as of the good, the unjust as well as the just, the wilful and disobedient as well as the dutiful. It was while rebuking them if they only loved those who loved them, that He bade them be perfect even as their Father in heaven is perfect.

The Hebrew psalmists and prophets had conceived of God as a Father as well as a Judge and a King; but

they had hardly risen, even in their highest flights, beyond the conception that "like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth *them that fear Him*." It is the distinction of Jesus that He removed this condition, this limitation, and affirmed God to be the Father of all men, a Father who loved even those who did not love Him, and pitied even those who did not fear Him. The universal fatherhood of God, as implying the universal brotherhood of man, was the very truth which above all others He had set Himself to impress on the minds of his disciples. And, hence, He might well be both astonished and grieved when, at the close of his earthly ministry, one of them turned upon Him with the demand, "Shew us the Father, and it is all we want."

Nor did his chief Apostles, the men who have done most to shape the thoughts of the Church, fail to insist on this selfsame truth. The love of God, his inalienable love for all men, is the main theme of the Scriptures we owe to St. John. And St. Paul, even when he addressed the light and giddy Athenians who would have none of his gospel, endorsed that saying of one of their own poets, "We are his offspring," and assured them that in God both they and all men, even though they were sinners of the Gentiles, lived, and moved, and had their being; while in this very Epistle (Chap. ii. vers. 4, 5), he exults in the great love wherewith God loved us *even when we were dead in trespasses and sins*.

But if the Lord Jesus and those who knew most of his mind and had most of his Spirit asserted this preg-

nant and happy fact so plainly, how comes it to pass that it has produced so slight an effect on the theology of the Church ; an effect so slight that when we now try to formulate it and build up our beliefs upon it, we are rebuked as bringing in heresies, as departing from the standard of faith, as venting opinions which are "loose," "unsound," and even "dangerous" ? Is "the truth" dangerous ? Can we deviate from the true standard of faith by accepting the teaching of Christ ? Must not our conceptions of what God is lie at the very basis of any sound theology ? And if God be the Father of all men, if *this* be the largest and highest conception of Him which even Christ Himself could teach us, ought we not to make this conception our theological standard, and refuse to believe any doctrine, or dogma, which is inconsistent with it ?

The fact is that, while we all profess to derive our theology straight from the Bible, we really derive the forms into which we throw our conceptions of its teaching from the ruling ideas of the age in which we live, and run our interpretations of the Inspired Word into the moulds which our prevailing habits of thought have afore provided for them.¹ You must not suppose

¹ Canon Mozley was, so far as I know, the first to formulate this fact ; but in his valuable work (*Ruling Ideas in Early Ages*) he only applies his formula to the earlier and more barbarous events and laws recorded in the Old Testament ; *e.g.*, the sacrifice of Isaac, the murder of Sisera, the law of Retaliation. Those who would see it applied to New Testament times and the Christian theology must consult *Old and New Theology* by Rev. J. B. Heard, M.A., an able and suggestive book which discusses all, or nearly all, the points I have touched, at length, and with a great wealth of illustration.

that the theological dogmas of any Christian age were framed by men who consciously wrested the Word of God to uses of their own, and compelled it to serve their personal ends, or even the interests of a sacerdotal caste. As a rule—though there have been certain terrible exceptions to it—they were men who were at least as good and as sincere as ourselves, and who studied the Holy Scriptures as candidly and devoutly as any of us can do. But, quite inevitably, they had certain ways of looking at *every* subject presented to their minds. These ways or habits of thought of necessity influenced and biassed the forms which their conceptions took and the conclusions at which they arrived. And these ways and habits of thought had been bred in them by the general spirit and manner of thinking of the time in which they lived,—as, indeed, ours are and must be to this day, since no man can remain altogether unaffected by the mental, any more than by the aerial, atmosphere of his place and hour.

When, for example, kings reigned “by the grace of God,” and not by the will or for the good of the people, when they were the sole source of honour, when they could enrich or plunder their subjects at their will, when it was theirs either to pardon or to destroy—a type of monarch which stretched from the Roman Empire to the English Tudors and the French Bourbons—is it any wonder that theologians conceived of “the moral Governor of the universe” as ruling the world, not by law, but by sovereign decrees, and held Him to resemble that king of Babylon of whom it is recorded that “whom he

willed he slew, and whom he willed he kept alive"? When the organization of society was so rude that the masses of men were supposed to live and toil mainly for the benefit of select and favoured classes; when jurisprudence was so defective that men were hung for the most trivial crimes, and offences against the head of the State were punished not only with death, but with tortures skilfully graduated and varied for the express purpose of protracting them to the longest span, and carrying them to the last pitch of severity—is it any marvel that divines held the vast majority of men to be "foreordained unto death," or even condemned to torments which had no end? They did not intend to import the ruling ideas of State policy and jurisprudence into their interpretation of the Word of God; but their whole method of thought was so penetrated by those ideas, so saturated with them, that they saw them in the Word, and suffered them to give force and colour to all the doctrines they deduced from it.

Do any of you object: "But surely these men could not have overlooked the main stress and intention of our Lord's teaching. They must have seen that He affirmed God to be the Father, and therefore the Lover, of all men. How came it to pass, then, that they evaded the force of this disclosure, conceived of God mainly as 'the moral Governor of the universe,' and transferred their impressions of earthly monarchs and human laws to the King of heaven and to his rule?" The answer is plain. *Fatherhood* was not to them what it is to us, any more than kingship. Their fathers were kings of the house-

hold instead of their kings being fathers of the people. In the Roman Empire the father had the power of life and death over his children. All through Europe the household rule was rigid and severe, an administration of law rather than a ministry of love, an appeal to fear rather than a claim on duty and affection. Many of us must still remember households in which some touch of that austerity still lingered. When, therefore, divines read the New Testament and found God described as a Father, they assumed Him to be such a father as they had known—a stern Governor rather than a close and inalienable Friend. How could they but assume it? Words mean to us only what our experience has taught us they mean. And, to them, there was little more grace in the word “father” than in the word “king.”

Hence it was, I suppose, that one of the curiosities of theology took its rise. In the Roman Empire “adoption” was as familiar a practice for many centuries as it is in India to-day. And this custom of adoption gave form to the doctrinal system of those Western fathers of whom *our* fathers learned pretty much all they knew. According to them, it was only in a very secondary and unimportant sense that men could be called the sons of God. It was not birth that conferred sonship, but second birth. Only the elect, only those who had been born again, were sons of God in any momentous sense of the word. And even these were sons only by adoption, not by nature or by birth, and held their position solely in virtue of the covenant, or compact,

into which they had entered, at their adoption, with their Maker and Lord.

All this sounds artificial to us, unjust, cruel, revolting to common sense and reason and conscience. But it did not seem so to them. They were familiar with fathers who might disinherit their children, who might torture and kill, or spare and caress them, who might adopt strangers, aliens even, and lavish their love and wealth upon them. Why should the Divine fatherhood be unlike the only fatherhood they had ever known?

If *we* have learned to find a larger and more gracious meaning in the words of our Lord, that is because during the last century all the ruling ideas have changed with the changeful spirit of the age, because our conceptions of government, jurisprudence, and domestic life have been elevated, softened, enlarged. *We* are sure that kings reign, or should reign, for the benefit of the people whom they are called to rule. We are sure that the punishments which enforce law and order should be proportioned to the offence, that they should be inflicted for the good, *i.e.*, the admonition and defence of the community at large, and for the reformation of the offender. We are sure that fathers should cherish their children, and rule by love, not by fear; that birth is a claim to bounty; and that no true parent can cease to love his child, or to seek his welfare, however wilful and disobedient he may have been. And we can no more help bringing our conceptions and convictions to the interpretation of the Bible than our fathers could help bring-

ing theirs. With the ruling ideas of the age wrought into the very structure of our minds, we *must* think of God, and of our relations to Him, and of his relations to us, more widely and more nobly than did those whose minds were formed by ideas of a much narrower and harder type.

And why should we not? If we believe that "an *increasing* purpose" runs through the ages, that God is slowly educating the race, and has ever more light ready to break forth from his Word; if we believe that the Spirit of God is slowly but surely leading us into all truth, as we are able to bear it: how can we but believe that the changes in every province of human thought which have marked our century, and notably the more gentle and more reasonable conceptions of the purpose and intention of government, jurisprudence, and family life, are his work, and are enabling us to read his Word with other larger eyes? These who cleave to the theological formulas of a bygone age often flatter themselves that they are truer to God and to the Bible than we are. But do you not perceive that it is not God and the Bible to which they are true, but to the cast-off mental clothes of their ancestors, to the human interpretations of the Bible which necessarily prevailed in a less happily constituted and enlightened age than this? It is the ruling ideas of the Roman Empire and Mediæval Europe to which they are loyal, not to the grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ. Nay, if the gracious promise of Christ is being fulfilled, and the world is being led by his Spirit to know and do greater things

than it could know and do in times of greater ignorance and indocility, then, so far from being loyal to God in clinging to the dogmas of a bygone age, they are *disloyal* to Him and to the light in which a new age, with its better customs and wiser laws, enables us to read the Word of truth and life.

It would be unreasonable to blame the men of any time for being influenced by the ruling ideas of their time ; but what are we to think of the men who *refuse* to be influenced by them, who, in the teeth of reason and Scripture, cling to the interpretations which sprang from the ruling ideas of a time long past? We ought not to blame, or ought not severely to blame, for instance, the Latin fathers who found in my text, or forced into it, the doctrine of total depravity and original sin. With their frame of mind, wrought upon by the ideas of their age, it was not unnatural for them to take it as teaching that men are *not* children of God by nature, but children of God's wrath ; although, if they had not been misled by their preconceptions, they might surely have seen that nothing is said here of *God's* wrath, and that their reading of this verse runs right in the face of a hundred other verses in the New Testament. But what are we to say for scholars of our own time who, with all the influences of the time and all the structural tendencies of their own minds urging them in the opposite direction, persist in reading St. Paul's phrase thus, and in finding in it, or into it, the same incredible dogmas?

"Children of wrath" means simply "wrathful men,"

men who give way to wrath, just as "sons of disobedience," in the previous verse, means "disobedient men." Or, if we take up the connotations of the Greek phrase, "children of wrath" means men who abandon themselves to their natural impulses, cravings, lusts, just as the initiated Asiatics and Hellenes did in the *orgies* with which they celebrated their "mysteries." It was against this unbridled, irregular, excessive indulgence of natural appetite and desire that St. Paul had been warning his converts at Ephesus. And, here, he simply reminds them that by nature they are as liable to these gusts of passion and excess as their neighbours, and must, therefore, be on their guard against them.

That is the simple and natural meaning of his words, as I suppose you can see the moment it is put before you. But if you turn to two of the best commentaries published within the last seven years, one tells you that there is no doubt *whose* wrath is meant here, or that the Apostle affirms all men to lie by nature under the frown of God's anger : while the other says, " This is a direct statement of the doctrine of Original Sin. Men are sinful (and therefore lying under God's anger), not because they have each fallen away from the natural uprightness received at birth, but by their very nature which is faulty and corrupt since the Fall. . . . From this passage is drawn the description of the unregenerate, given in the Catechism of the Church of England, as 'being born in sin and the children of wrath ;' from which state each child is delivered on *admission into covenant* with God in Baptism, just as the Ephesians who had been *adopted*

in Christ . . . were thereby spiritually quickened.”¹ Both these commentaries, strange to say, were written by scholars of a broad and liberal turn of mind. But do you suppose it would have been possible for them to find all these dreadful dogmas in St. Paul’s simple and innocent phrase if their minds had not been pre-occupied with the Articles of the Church to which they belong—articles which took form from the ruling ideas of bygone centuries?

“Adam was the son of God,” says the New Testament; and it is but a reasonable inference from that assertion to conclude that, whatever evil bias Adam’s children derive from him, they also derive from him the nature which he received from God: how, else, could Jesus have been the son of Adam? And this reasonable inference is confirmed by experience, since no man is so bad but that we may find much good in him, if only we know how to look for it, and no man so good but that he at least finds much that is evil in himself. All men are by nature the children of God, affirms Christ, for He is the Father of all. Nay, say the theologians, all men are by nature “the children of wrath.” There is nothing good in them until they are regenerated; they are altogether born in sin: and even when they are born again, they are only “adopted” children, and have simply a “covenant” relation to Him. And so, with one breath, they teach us—teach even the unregenerate—to call God “our Father in heaven;” and with another, they rob us of our Father even before we have begun to

¹ *The Speaker’s Commentary, in loco.*

wander from Him, and to waste his substance in riotous living! The best that the Prodigal can hope for, if he should repent and return, is that he should be *adopted* as a child, not *recognized* for a son, when he has entered into a solemn compact with his Father who yet is not his Father! Nay, even the dutiful son, who is always at home, and has never transgressed the commandment, was also born in sin, and is by nature a child of wrath like the other, and is only retained in the home on sufferance! "Love the evil and the unthankful" is Christ's command to us, "even though they be not your children." "But," add our divines, "you must not expect God to be so perfect as that. *He* does not love the evil and unthankful, even though they be his children in some secondary sense of the word"!

Do you not see, my brethren, that, for us at least, who know what a father is, and what a king should be, almost every page of the New Testament would have to be rewritten; and, above all, that the very pages which come straight home to every heart, without any aid from commentator or divine, would have to be rewritten before we could honestly accept the theology which contented our fathers? Do you not also see where they got the ideas which—insensibly to them—shaped their conceptions of the New Testament teaching, and made their conceptions so unlike what we read in it that we cannot accept them without doing a violence to our very nature? Had we lived when they lived, under their forms of government, jurisprudence, and austere domestic rule, what contented them might have contented us.

Happily we cannot read with their eyes, or in the dim and not very religious light which was all they had. We *must* read the Bible in the light of our own time, of an age which is not less, but more, an age of God than any which preceded it. Every generation in which there is a real advance of thought must shape its theology for itself, though the religious facts which lie behind all our theologies remain the same from age to age.¹ And for

¹ This sentence has a history which gives it a special interest to me, and may have an interest for others. It was once my good fortune to spend a week or two on the Bel Alp when Professor Tyndall was in the house which crowns it. I had the pleasure of talking with him more than once ; but I had heard that he had suffered many things at the hands of many "parsons," and I determined that I at least would not force any religious argument upon him. But one evening, after dinner, when we had all gathered in front of the hotel to marvel at and admire one of the grandest sunsets of the season, we lingered in the dusk and fell into groups for social intercourse. At last I heard Professor Tyndall speaking to the largest group in measured tones, and, on joining it, I found that he himself had introduced the very subject on which I most wished but had hardly hoped to hear him speak. At this distance of time I cannot expect and shall not attempt to reproduce his entire argument, and still less the rare conversational eloquence with which it was expressed. For some five or ten minutes he enlarged on the theme that all religion is of necessity "fluid," that, if it is to retain its power, it must take shape from the form and pressure of the time, changing with its changes, and adapting itself to the instant wants of men. The grandeur of the scene and the stillness of the hour lent a strange and penetrating force to his words. But it pained me to perceive, as I thought I did, that under all his well-turned sentences there lay the tacit assumption that the facts and relations which Religion postulates and involves had no substantial existence, or, if they had, none that could be known to man. Hence, when he ceased, I ventured to ask : "But, Professor, is not all that you have said just as true of *Science* as it is of Religion ? Is it not your distinction and that of all who take a lead in the

nothing ought we to be more devoutly grateful than for this—that we live in an age in which, if we will but open our eyes, we may see that we are not by nature “children of wrath,” but children of the Eternal Love ; that God is our true Father and the Father of all men, and loves us with a love that must seek, until it find, us.

scientific world that, year by year, and generation by generation, you are framing new and more adequate hypotheses of the phenomena of the universe, bringing them closer to the facts they are intended to cover and explain? Yet ‘fluid’ and changeable as your hypotheses are, are not the scientific facts for which you seek the reason and the law the same from age to age? And if that be so, may it not be equally true that, while our little theological systems have their day and cease to be, the religious facts and relations which lie behind them all, and of which they give a more and more adequate account, abide unchanged for ever?”

I could see that he was struck by the analogy, which still seems to me a perfectly fair one, and was considering his reply, which I on my part was very anxious to hear, as I did not doubt he would have something weighty and suggestive to urge in reply. But, unfortunately, a Scotchman in the group interposed some remark on Hegel and the Absolute, and, turning to him, Professor Tyndall fell into a discussion on Hegel which lasted until we broke up. Nor did I ever have a chance of resuming the conversation, as I had to leave the Alp early the next morning.

V.

ABRAHAM.

“Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?”

GENESIS xviii. 25.

IT was Abraham who asked that question. But though a question in form, in substance it is an affirmation. Abraham had no doubt, he was sure that the Judge, *i.e.*, the Ruler, of the whole earth would both do right and get right done at the last. There was nothing else of which he was so sure as of this. The conviction that one God ruled all the world, and that this God was a righteous God who insisted on righteousness in men, was the deepest, the ruling and shaping, conviction of his soul. His religion grew out of it ; his character was formed by it ; his hopes were based on it. We may take it as the key to his whole nature and history.

Let us consider, then, how great this man was, how great this conviction made him, and what a wonderful unity it lends to his whole life, to all the scattered facts recorded of him.

1. The very first thing we hear of him is that in some mysterious way, by an inward Divine call of which we

have no explanation, he had reached this conviction. His father, and forefathers, had served many and other gods than Jehovah. But Jehovah "took" or "called" Abraham, we are told; *i.e.*, He in some way revealed Himself to him as the only true God, and moved him to respond to that revelation. By an act of devotion difficult for us to adequately estimate, Abraham separated himself at once from the tents and from the idolatry of his fathers and his neighbours, put a mighty river between himself and them, and commenced that long pilgrimage, that long quest after the inheritance promised to him which knew no earthly close.

Consider, then, for a moment, how great this initial act was. Idolatry, the recognition of many gods, was the prevalent religion, not of his own clan alone, but, so far as he knew, of the whole world. It was "in possession of the ground, and pressed upon him with all the power of association and authority."¹ But at the first instant at which we catch sight of him Abraham has thrown off this creed or superstition, in defiance of custom and habit. He has released himself from the bondage of early associations, and challenged the whole force of public opinion and authority, in order that he may worship the one God who rules heaven and earth, in order that he may come into close and immediate relation with the Maker and Ruler of all.

And do we not all know how strong the claims of

¹ *Ruling Ideas in Early Ages*, by Canon Mozley, to whom I owe several of the thoughts, but not the leading thought of this Discourse.

habit, of general custom, of accepted authority are ; how difficult it is to break away from the ruling ideas of the age in which we live ? To resist their influence, to swim against the current of received opinion and established authority, on the mere prompting of an inward conviction for which no proof can be adduced, denotes a certain greatness and heroism of character, a strength and independence of mind amounting to originality. A man must stand head and shoulders above his fellows, he must be "before his time," he must habitually live in that which is best and highest in his nature, he must be a bold thinker and a daring reformer, before he can thus oppose himself to the pressure of his age, sever himself from his own past, and commit himself at all risks to the persuasion which has grown up in his own heart, but in no other heart than his.

In cutting himself loose, then, from the opinions and associations of his youth, from the habit and influence and piety of his age, to sail into an unknown and untried sea of thought and action, Abraham gives us the first proof that he was a man of the noble and heroic type. He was one of the few over whom "ideas" rule rather than "interests," and rule with an irresistible power ; a man who, when once convinced of any great truth, would meet it greatly, would dwell on it, and feed on it, and act on it, giving it an undivided sway, and following it whithersoever it might lead, at any cost of toil and sacrifice.

2. Nor was it long before his new conviction drew him into intellectual and moral perplexities which called

for a new exercise of that forecasting fervour which we call Faith. To a man who believes in many gods, whose prerogatives and provinces of action limit each other on every side, the apparently malignant forces of Nature, and the obvious inequalities and wrongs of human life, either present no problem at all or a problem capable of easy solution. For *his* gods are limited in power, and limited in goodness. They cannot do all they wish, and they do not always wish to do that which is right. They are betrayed by passion, as we are, or they are involved in strife; or, lapped in indulgence and mirth, they listen with indifference to the ancient tale of wrong. Even if conscience revolted against so poor and base a conception of the gods as this—as in the more thoughtful minds of Antiquity it often did—it was easy to fall back on the belief that the very gods, however beneficent in themselves, were but the ministers of a dark inscrutable Fate, whose decrees neither gods nor men could anticipate or evade. But when a man emerged from the Pantheon, with its roof of dark impenetrable clouds from which the bolts and flashes fell of which no one could say whence they came and whither they would go; when he came to believe in *one* God as the Judge of all the earth, the problem of Providence grew more mysterious than ever, and seemed to be incapable of any reasonable solution. For if there be but one God, and He is at once good and almighty, why does He permit the evils which are alien to his nature, and which it must be in his power to prevent? That is a question which men have never ceased to ask,

which many are asking to this day. For we cannot but believe the *universe* to be an *unity*, so subtle and innumerable are the chords which bind every atom to all the rest. And hence, if we have any religion at all, we cannot but believe in one God, the Maker of all, and one law—his will, even if we do not believe in the one far-off divine event to which the whole creation moves. It is our very faith in Him which moves and compels us to ask why, since He is almighty and rules over all, our lives are tainted and saddened and depressed by the manifest and undeniable evils—the pain and wrong and injustice—to which we and our fellows are daily exposed. The problem is still so far from being solved to the reason of man that, as some of you will remember, one of our keenest modern thinkers, John Stuart Mill, came sorrowfully to the conclusion that God, if there be a God, cannot be absolute both in goodness and in power; that He must be lacking either in the goodness which will suffer nothing but good to fall to his creatures, or in the power to carry out the intentions of his good and perfect will.

It was this dark problem which threw its shadows across the soul of Abraham. He had been told of the approaching overthrow of the wicked cities of the Plain, cities in which, wicked as they were, he knew there were a few righteous souls. And to him it was nothing short of horrible that God should “sweep away the righteous with the wicked,” as we may infer from the boldness and the iterations of his remonstrance with the Divine Ruler of men: “That be far from thee to do after this manner,

to slay the righteous with the wicked ! That the righteous should be as the wicked, this be far from thee ! ” And yet, though God conceded much to him, He did not concede any solution of the problem why the just and the unjust are often overtaken by the same doom, much less of that still deeper problem, why men are so made and so conditioned that they may become wicked much more easily than they become righteous. He had to fall back on faith, on his intuitive conviction that the Ruler of all the earth *must* do right, must love righteousness better than any of his creatures love it, must be bent on getting righteousness done in the earth.

It was in this indomitable faith, this reliance on great religious convictions which came to him he knew not how, though he was sure they came from Heaven, this refusal to part with them or distrust them, let appearances say what they would, that the real greatness of the man came out, the greatness which has made him the father of the faithful of every age. And in no other way can *we* become great ; on no other terms can we be true to our simplest and deepest convictions, the only convictions which can sustain us in the love and pursuit of that which is right under all the changes and temptations of time. *We*, indeed, may see reasons for the permission of evil, for the existence of pain and sorrow and wrong, which Abraham could not see, since we may regard them as an inevitable part of the discipline by which we are being raised to our full stature, first, as men, and, then, as men in Christ Jesus. We may see that we ought to trust in the perfect goodness of God

even when we cannot prove it, just as the artist believes in an ideal beauty which he has never beheld and cannot express, just as the man of science believes in a hypothetical and reconciling truth which he has not yet demonstrated, amid the failure of many attempts to verify it. But when all is done that reason can do, we, like Abraham, shall have to fall back on the intuitions and inspirations of faith, on the power of convictions which we have found to be true and fruitful and life-giving in so far as we have adventured upon them, on those abiding and sustaining presentiments of the heart which no science can preach down and no experience disprove. We *must* believe that there is but one God if the whole world of reasoned thought is not to fall in ruin about us. We must believe that the Judge of all the earth will both do right and get right done, if all the testimonies and prophecies of conscience are not to be belied, and our whole moral life is not to be cast away on the rocks. And faith is reasonable when it is based on such supports as these. To believe becomes a duty if reason and conscience and the history of the ages prove that it were better we had never been born than born to believe in no God, or in a God who is not good and cannot make us good.

3. Abraham's faith in the justice of God had another result which we must consider if we would know the sort of man he was, and recognize his greatness. Though he entirely believed that the Judge of all the earth would do right, he could not but observe, as the years went on, that the due reward of men's deeds was often slow in

arriving. Though he entirely believed that the Ruler of all mankind would make men righteous, he saw that for the present many remained unrighteous, and, for some inscrutable reason, were permitted to prosper in unrighteousness. As the intuitions and hopes of faith were not fulfilled in the present, instead of doubting truth itself to be a liar, he projected himself into the future and looked for a fulfilment yet to come which should justify his largest hopes. He was sure that it was the Judge of all the earth who had promised him, "In thee, and in thy seed, shall all the families (*i.e.*, 'nations') of the earth be blessed;" and his faith embraced that promise and rested on it. As yet he could see no such blessing, nor any prospect of it; nevertheless he was persuaded that it was coming and "greeted it from afar." In short, he grasped what we deem the modern conception of *progress*, of a rising and increasing purpose running through the ages and the affairs of men, and believed that a movement in the order of the world had been commenced which would lead to some great end and consummation in the distant future.

Now to live in and for the future, rather than in and for the present, is a great and signal achievement, and indicates a remarkable and original strain of mind. For the ordinary man does not take thought for the future of the world. He lives in and for the present, and hardly expects that men will ever be very different from what they are to-day. To him the great hopes of a golden age to come, of a perfected society in which all men will be free, and just, and good, which were cherished by the

poets and thinkers of Greece and Rome, but came to their full expression only in the psalmists and prophets of Israel and of the Christian Church—these great hopes, the forecasts of faith, in which all the great philosophies and religions of the world are at one,¹ have as little effect on the average man plunged in his toils, his merchandise, his amusements, as the ethereal chimes of his lofty towers and steeples have on the Belgian peasant buying and selling in the market-place below them. He would miss them, perhaps, were the music to cease ; but they call up no forms of beauty, no vision of hope, before his mind. They do not tell on his buying and selling, on his ambitions, on his pleasures, and make him more just, more temperate, more generous. He is not “a being breathing thoughtful breath ;” his very religion is little more than a creed or a ceremony ; and because he has little faith, his hopes burn dim and low.

It is, therefore, a mark of true greatness in Abraham that, in a primitive age, standing as on the threshold of time, he was habitually looking onward to the future life of the world, and forecasting the nobler forms it would assume. He at least was not confined to “the ignorant present,” so occupied and pre-occupied with

¹ Even Carlyle, that prophet of woe and doom, was not without “the vision splendid.” In one of the finest passages of *Characteristics* he writes : “Out of all Evil comes Good ; and no Good that is possible but shall one day be real. Deep and sad as is our feeling that we stand yet in the bodeful Night ; equally deep and indestructible is our assurance that the Morning also will not fail. Nay, already as we look round, streaks of a dayspring are in the east ; it is dawning : when the time shall be fulfilled, it will be day.”

eating and drinking, buying and selling, marrying and giving in marriage, as to have no outlook into the larger and higher spaces of the soul. The chimes *had* a message for him. The future might be dim, but none the less he was sure that the world would have a great future, that humanity was moving onward and upward to its goal and rest, that Time held in its hand a great benediction in which all the nations of the earth would share. A righteous race in a renovated earth, an earth in which at last the Judge of all the earth will get right done, an earth in which, because its righteousness stands firm as the great mountains, peace will flow like a river—this was his forecast for the world, as it was that of all the prophets who came after him.

It is the only forecast which makes life worth living, and the world worth working for, which can redeem our existence from the trivial round of self-regarding tasks and aims in which too many of us spend, and waste, our days. Bend your eyes on the future, then, if you would redeem the present and live nobly in it. Lift up your heads, and listen to the sweet chimes of faith and hope, which sound even more clearly from the prophetic heights of the New Testament than from those of the Old. Strong in faith, strong in hope, live and labour for the good time coming in which all men shall know, and love, and serve the Lord of all.

4. Abraham's confidence in the justice of God led him one step further—the long step from earth to heaven. After a life of wandering and exposure, full of toil and trial and strife, he possessed no more of the

earth over which God ruled, and all whose families were to be the better and the richer for his faith in God, than would suffice for his grave. Yet he had been as true to the Divine call as human frailty would permit. He had turned aside from no adventure, and no trial, imposed upon him. He had been disloyal to no conviction quickened within him. A just man, a man full of faith, he was going hence without reward, or without any such reward as he had been taught to expect. Could it be that after all the Judge of all the earth would not do him right? Nay, that could not be; God could not deny Himself. Yet *how* was He to fulfil Himself and his word?

This was a question to which sense and understanding had no reply. But, once more Faith stepped in to whisper that God fulfils Himself in many ways; that if He did not keep his word on this side the veil of death, it was only because He had "prepared" a better fulfilment behind the veil. And thus once more a great man rose to the greatness of the occasion, and, simply because he would not let go his trust in the justice of his Judge, Abraham learned to "look for a better country, even a heavenly" (Heb. xi. 16).

Now it may sound very noble and unselfish to say, "Let me perish when I die. I am content to die and be forgotten if only I have contributed to the ultimate welfare of the world, to its knowledge, its enrichment, its peace and joy. I ask for no other, for no personal reward." But is it not at least equally unselfish, may it not be even more noble, to say, "I ask for no reward

except to serve Thee still, and to serve Thee in serving my neighbours still better"? The wish to live a life of continued and ever-growing serviceableness, does not this hold by that which is likest God within the soul, likest to Him who is the Ruler of all because He is the Minister of all? Abraham, when he found no country allotted him on earth, desired a better, even a heavenly, country. But was that a selfish or ignoble desire if it sprang from the wish to see the Divine justice magnified, and if to be ruler over many things is to enter into the joy of the Lord? No man can really rule his fellows except by serving them, even here on earth: and how, except by an ampler and more effectual service, can he be among the ruling spirits in heaven, where all things come to their perfection?

There is a show of disinterested humility in saying, "I ask for no reward, present or future, for any service I have rendered my fellows beyond the consciousness of having served them;" but it is not the humility which defers to the will of God, nor is it the disinterestedness which aims at the highest possible welfare of man. For, though we might think none the worse of a man for asking no wage for his service, could we think so well of God if, having accepted the service, He paid no wages? And though a man might be content to serve one term, should he not desire to serve on as long as possible, through as many terms, in as many worlds, if he is thinking, not of himself and of his own ease, but of doing as much for his fellows as he may? It sounds very grand to sigh, "O let me join the choir invisible!"

and I do not deny that the sigh may be prompted by a fine though indefinite emotion ; but if "invisible" means non-existent, and the "choir" does not sing, one hardly sees how it is to contribute either to the welfare of man or to the glory of God.

Do not be afraid, then, to look for a reward in the better country, even the heavenly ; for there too God may have some duties for you to fulfil, and you will be the better able to fulfil them for having been trained to do his will and serve your fellows in these fleeting hours of time. And while God has any work for you to do, and men have any need of your help, is it noble and unselfish of you to say, "I have done enough, I ask no more" ? If the spirit of faithful Abraham be in you, you *will* ask and look for more, and find your joy as well as your reward in the duties and services of the better land.

Many such lessons as those I have tried to indicate may be drawn from the Patriarch's history ; and the more of them we learn, and the better we learn them, the better it will be with us both in time and in eternity. But my main endeavour has been to hold your minds close to the fact, that in Abraham's conviction that God is the Judge of all the earth, and that the Judge of all the earth must do right and get right done, we have the secret, the master-key, to his whole character, the thought which binds all the recorded and apparently unconnected incidents of his life into a sacred unity and lends them fresh power. For if you have grasped this thought, you will, I think, understand the man as you cannot possibly

understand him without it ; and whenever you read his story, and whatever the attitude in which you meet him, you will be the more likely to apprehend him aright, and the more deeply convinced that only by a faith like his can you solve the mystery of Providence, and embrace a hope for yourselves and for the world at large which will never make you ashamed.

VI.

RELIGION AND REWARD.

“And I said, Should such a man as I flee? And who is there that, being as I am, could run into the temple to save his life? I will not go in.”—NEHEMIAH vi. 11.

THERE is a ring of manly courage and honest pride in these words which carries them straight home to our hearts. They need no commentary, no commendation. We understand and appreciate them the moment we hear them, or, at farthest, the moment we read them in connection with the events which forced them from Nehemiah's lips. He was rebuilding the walls and setting up the gates of Jerusalem. In this patriotic work he was opposed by foes without the city, and by traitors within. Sanballat the Moabite, Tobiah the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arab or the Amalekite—all of them ancient foes of the peace of Israel—charged him with treason to his Persian master, and sought to draw him out of the city into the plain where they had set an ambush for him. Foiled in their attempts to take his life, they plotted to destroy his reputation and influence. They bribed a prophet, a *Hebrew* prophet, to deliver him a

message in the name of the Lord, a message which bade him take refuge in the temple from the dangers to which he was exposed in the city and on the walls. Had he listened to the message, the work would have ceased : for how should the people have continued to expose themselves to perils by which their brave governor had been daunted ? His reputation and influence would have been lost : for how should they have continued to respect a man who cared more for himself than for them, more for his own safety than for the security and welfare of the city over which he ruled ?

To Nehemiah, however, it was wholly incredible that a message which bade him place safety before duty could have come from God. A prophet brought it, indeed ; but if an angel out of heaven had brought it, it would still have been incredible that a message so base should have come from heaven. He perceived at once that *God* had not sent Shemaiah to pronounce this prophecy against him, but his foes and the foes of God (Verse 12). And he repudiates it with a passionate scorn and indignation which still throb in the words, " Should such a man as I flee ? *Who* is there that, being as I am, *could* run into the temple to save his life ? *I will not go in.*" He claims no special credit for himself, you perceive, no exceptional virtue. He is sure that no man in his position could be so base as to consult his personal safety at the cost of public duty, and turn the temple of God into a mere asylum from his fears. And, as I have said, we need no comment on his words. We admit that in his position, as a leader and commander of the

people, bound, therefore, to set them an example of honourable and courageous fidelity to duty, it would have been disgraceful to him had he followed the counsel of the false and venal prophet. We sympathize with and admire the emotion with which he rejects it. In his place we hope we should have taken his tone, and trod his path. And we have some reason for the hope. Whatever its faults, it has never been the way of the English race to subordinate public duty to private fears. Our history, both at home and abroad, is full of instances in which men have run all risks and braved all dangers rather than desert posts of peril they have been called to fill. In Ireland, in India, in the Soudan, throughout the world, danger has only proved an additional incentive to duty. Heroism of this kind, indeed, is not uncommon in the annals of any leading race.

1. And yet, where the Temple is concerned, where Religion comes in, where, therefore, we ought to be at our best and to take the highest ground, can we be quite so sure of ourselves and of one another—so sure that mere safety is no attraction as compared with duty, so sure that we love righteousness more than reward? Put on Nehemiah's words the highest construction they will bear, and can we *then* adopt them? Can we honestly say, "No man could be so base, or, if any man could, I at least will not be so base, as to run into the temple merely to save my life, merely to escape some danger that I fear or to secure some good that I desire"? It may be doubted. We need not unduly depreciate ourselves and our motives. We need not suspect ourselves

of being among the miserable hypocrites who trade in their religion, who join some Church or Sect for the sake of the custom it will bring them, or for the show of respectability it will throw over lives which would not bear too close a scrutiny. We may be above all that. And yet it may be our fears rather than our convictions by which we are animated, or our hope of reward rather than a disinterested love of righteousness.

In the *popular* religion, at all events, no one can well doubt that these two motives—fear of loss and hope of gain, fear of personal loss and hope of private gain—play a very great part ; that these are the main, if not the exclusive, motives to which it appeals.

Many men do run into the temple to save their lives or, as they put it, to save their souls. Their religion is simply a refuge, an asylum, from their fears. How can it well be anything else when the popular theology is for ever harping on their fears, and harping, alas, on their fear of punishment in this world or in the world to come rather than on their fear of evil? The modern pulpit may no longer be all aflame with the fires of a material hell, but does it not for the most part still appeal mainly to the baser and more cowardly elements in our nature, threatening us with an eternal pain, an eternal loss, an eternal misery, an eternal shame, and urging us to save ourselves, or suffer ourselves, to be saved from them?

I do not deny either that the appeal to fear is legitimate, or that it is sanctioned by Holy Writ. I admit that even the New Testament affirms the inevitable

punishments which wait on sin, offers to save us from them, and urges us to accept of that salvation. But I contend that it also teaches us to fear sin itself more than any of the punishments of sin, and to dread evil more than the pain and loss and shame which evil breeds, and by which it avenges itself upon us. I contend that it appeals to our love and admiration of goodness as well as to our fear of evil, to our sense of duty and our craving for truth as well as to our fear of punishment; and, above all, to the love of God our Father, the love which He has shewn for us and proved to us, as a reason why we should respond to it and yield a cheerful obedience to his law. In short, there is no part of our nature to which it does not lay siege, to which it does not hold out its appropriate inducement. There is no motive of which we are capable to which it does not appeal, from the lowest to the highest; although, as one might expect, it makes its most frequent and earnest appeal to that in us which is highest and best.

Take, for example, the teaching of our Lord Jesus as a whole, and I am bold to say that where He once appeals to our fear of pain and loss, He appeals a dozen times to our sense of the evil and degradation of sin; and that where He once appeals to our fear of evil, He a dozen times appeals to our admiration of that which is good and kind in God and man. And, therefore, to proclaim a gospel which appeals simply to fear, and whose salvation is mainly a salvation from hell, is to degrade both the gospel itself and those who listen to it. Listening to such a gospel, a gospel which speaks as if

"Flee from the wrath to come" were the sole injunction of the New Testament, any man of fine instincts and noble aspirations might well reply with Nehemiah, "Should such a man as I flee? Who is there that, being as I am, would run into the temple merely to save his life? I will not go in." But offer such an one salvation from the evil which he hates but cannot overcome, salvation into the goodness which he loves but cannot attain; open up to him the way of life, instead of for ever threatening him with the pangs of death and hell; appeal to whatever is noble, brave, aspiring in him, and not simply to that which is selfish and sordid and base, and he will listen to you with respect if not with conviction and delight. He will feel that you offer him a gospel worthy of all acceptance, even though he should not forthwith accept it.

Nor is the distinction between these two modes of presenting the Gospel, the New Testament mode and the popular mode, of slight importance. It is of the gravest importance. For, first, the popular mode, with its perpetual appeal to fear, repels the best and most thoughtful kind of men, men "*naturally* Christian," the very men who ultimately guide and rule their fellows. And, then, it fosters even in those with whom it wins acceptance the very qualities from which it ought to deliver them. Cowardice and selfishness are not virtues even when they have regard to the future instead of the present life, but vices from which it is the very office of Religion to rescue us. St. Paul affirms (1 Cor. vi. 9, 10) that "no coward can enter heaven;" and our Lord

Himself teaches us that only as we die to self can we rise into the heavenly life. And, therefore, it should be our aim so to present the Gospel as to cherish, not the fear which trembles at the thought of hell, but the love that casts out fear ; not the selfishness which grasps at the mere prospect of safety or gain, but the charity which conquers selfishness. Selfishness and fear, whatever the objects to which they attach themselves, will never make a man noble or good, though they may make him prudent ; they will never make a man like Christ, though they may only too easily make him like those miserable enemies of all goodness who “believe and *tremble*.”

2. It is, I suppose, because so many have been drawn, or driven rather, into the Church by the fear of hell rather than by the fear of evil and the love of goodness, that the hope of future reward holds so large a place in the popular theology ; and that the kind of reward for which men hope is so often ignoble and delusive. “To do good, hoping for nothing in return,” or for nothing but the capacity to do better, is no doubt a high strain of virtue ; but it is not too high for mortal man beneath the sky or Christ would not have enjoined it upon us. Yet this is a strain to which many are never invited, even by those who profess to take the law and ideal of human life from the lips of Christ, or to which they are so rarely and faintly invited that it leaves no deeply engraven impression on their minds. After nineteen centuries of Christian teaching it is not yet an article in the popular creed !

Any man to whom the Gospel has unfolded itself in

its simplicity and beauty, is almost afraid to ask himself how many of his neighbours have run into the temple only to save their lives, not to rise into an ampler, fuller, and more useful life ; how many there are who would be content to remain pretty much what they are in themselves if only they might pass into happier outward conditions. But if you care to put the point to the proof, you have only to ascertain what conception of the heaven to which they aspire most of your neighbours have framed. Even if they do not conceive of it as a place in which they shall be clothed in purple and fine linen and fare sumptuously every day—and many of them have barely risen beyond that gross misconception of the future life, yet you will find only too many who comfort themselves thus : “We are poor here, but we shall be rich hereafter. Here we suffer pain, but in heaven we shall be filled with joy. Unknown here, we shall achieve distinction there. Despised now and trodden under foot, we shall there triumph over all our foes.” Is not that, or something like that, still the popular conception of heaven, even in the Church ? And yet how poor, selfish, and untrue it is, and is seen to be the instant we test it by the mind and word of Christ !

Here, again, I do not deny—no candid reader of the New Testament will deny—that the Christian Faith both promises and bestows an exceeding great reward, or that it bids us have “respect unto the recompense of the reward.” “Great *is* your reward.” “Great *shall be* your reward,” are words that were often on the lips of

Christ when He spake of the sufferings his disciples would have to bear, or the great and difficult tasks they would have to achieve. I do not even deny—how can any student of the Apocalypse deny?—that the outward conditions of the heavenly world are to be happier and more favourable than those of this present world. But more favourable *to what*? To a merely selfish and personal enjoyment? Nay, but to growth in wisdom, in holiness, in love, in capacity and serviceableness. What was our Lord's reward? what the joy set before *Him*? Was it not that He should rule and serve and bless the world which He had redeemed unto Himself by becoming a Sacrifice for us all? And are not we to enter into the joy of the Lord? What is the reward which He Himself adjudges to those who have been faithful in a few things? Is it not that they shall be rulers over many things, *i.e.*, that they shall have many capacities of service and many opportunities of proving their fidelity instead of few, and so shall do far more for Him and for their fellows than they have been able to do before?

Yes, there are many passages in the New Testament which speak of Reward; but there is not one of them which, if you read it fairly, does not imply that our chief reward is to be a growth in wisdom, in virtue, in usefulness, which will make us more like Him whom we serve. *This*, therefore, is the reward for which we should look, whether in the present or the future—not exemption from toil, pain, self-sacrifice, service, but an increase in the volume and energy of our spiritual life which will

enable us to find our truest delight in living for others rather than for ourselves, in serving others rather than ourselves.

How, indeed, could any other or lower reward be held out before us? All those self-regarding virtues which enter into the popular conception of the heavenly life are fatal to virtue and morality, not conducive to them. If a man say, "I will do this honest action because it will pay me to do it in the long run;" or, "I will do this kindly or generous action because it will bring me the respect and good-will of my neighbours," his motive vitiates and degrades his deed; his action is not virtuous but selfish, for he is moved simply by a regard for his own gain, or his own reputation. But if he says, "I will do this good or kindly deed in the hope that all such deeds will become easier to me and more habitual," who does not see that the case is entirely changed? "He is no longer seeking a reward *outside* the morality of the action, but only power to *repeat* the action." He is seeking no selfish gain, but a more virtuous and constant temper, an enlarged capacity for goodness, "an increase of virtue *through* virtue." "To desire such a reward as this is not only consistent with morality and virtue, it is the very essence of morality; it is the love of virtue itself."

There is, therefore, an immense, a radical difference between the Christian, and the popular, hope of reward, between the Christian and the popular conception of heaven. While the one fosters in us only the selfish or self-regarding motives which are fatal to virtue, the other

cherishes in us only the pure, disinterested, and noble motives without which Virtue is but a name. Animated by the one hope, we are sinking away from God and goodness; animated by the other, we are rising into likeness and fellowship with Him; for we are growing in love, and love is of God, and *is* God.

Animated by the selfish hope, too, we are alienating all men of a brave and manly spirit, a kindred spirit to Nehemiah's; while, animated by the disinterested hope, the hope of a reward that will make us stronger for all good and kindly service, we are attracting such men to the source and foundation of our hope. For whom do we and all men admire, and admire in proportion to our own manliness of character and fineness of temper—the men who live for themselves, or the men who live for the world, and who seek to rise and to improve themselves mainly that they may do more for the world and better? It is not the men who run into the temple merely to save their lives whom we honour, but the men who enter it to consecrate on its altars the gifts and powers which they use for the service of God and the relief of man's estate. The very spirit of the true gospel breathes in Lynch's simple but noble lines:

Dismiss me not thy service, Lord,
But train me for thy will;
For even I, in fields so broad,
Some duties may fulfil:
And I will ask for no reward
Except to serve Thee still.

Let this, then, be the spirit which we cultivate and cherish.

VII.

THE CITY OF THE SOUL.

‘Thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise.’

ISAIAH lx. 18.

THERE are many phrases and metaphors in the Bible which are obscure to us, not because they were obscurely expressed, nor because they are ill or imperfectly rendered into our English tongue, but simply because they allude to customs and modes of life which have long been obsolete. We forget how our fathers used to live, how their lives were conditioned; and hence words that went straight home to them have no meaning, or no clear and definite meaning, for us.

These words of Isaiah's, for instance, what do they mean—for us? Our fathers of only a few generations back would have understood them at a glance. But when *we* read the Prophet's glowing description of the new and restored Zion, though we are aware that he is conveying a great promise to his people, though we are touched by the stately music of the sentences in which that promise is couched, we form no clear conception of what many of his phrases were intended to convey.

Such words as those I have just read appeal to no facts with which we are familiar; they touch no pathetic chords of memory; they liberate no associations charged with tragic experiences of danger and deliverance. They remain obscure to us, though in themselves they are as clear and bright as day.

And if we turn to the commentators for help, they have little help to give us. I have just consulted the latest and best commentaries on this verse, and find them mainly occupied in assuring us that the gates, and even the walls, of ancient cities had proper or distinctive names, and in telling us what, for instance, the walls of ancient Babylon were called. And no doubt these are facts of some interest. But no educated Englishman needs to be assured of them, or will be aided by them to arrive at the Prophet's intention. If he lives in London, he must surely have heard of Lud-gate, and Bishops'-gate, and Ald-(or old-)gate, and New-gate, and Temple-bar. If he lives in Nottingham, he goes through Fletcher Gate, or Wheeler Gate, or Bridlesmiths Gate, or Castle Gate, or Hounds Gate, almost every day. And it really does not take much imagination or a profound historical erudition to infer, that when men lived in walled cities, and had to order off troops or watchmen to different sections of the wall, which sections, moreover, were often lined with houses on the inward side—these different sections or streets had names by which they might be known and distinguished the one from the other.

Let us assume that we have mastered these not very

recondite facts of antiquarian lore: what are we the nearer to Isaiah's meaning when he foretold that the inhabitants of the New Zion, or the New Jerusalem, would call their walls Salvation and their gates Praise? We should be no nearer to *that* even if we knew the names of all the gates and all the walls of all the cities that ever had gates and walls, from Damascus down to Chester or Edinburgh. To arrive at that, we must let our thoughts play freely about the words of the Prophet; we must endeavour to apprehend what walls and gates were to men when, outside the defenced cities, life and property were insecure.

Think, then, of the scenes which must often have been witnessed in the vicinity of our own ancient borough.¹ How many a well-to-do merchant, after having travelled through the Midland towns to collect his debts, has been scared on his way home by a report that the outlaws of the Forest were in pursuit of him; and, striking his spurs into his jaded beast, has ridden on in terror till he came in sight of the Castle Rock, and never drawn easy breath till he felt himself safe under the protection of his native walls. How often must the farmers of Bramcote and Bulwell, Cropwell and Thrumpton, hearing that a foreign or domestic foe was ravaging the land, have hastily gathered their families together, the pick of their flocks and herds, their portable valuables, and in their slow progress hitherward have been harassed by perpetual alarms, until they saw Salvation in the guarded walls of Nottingham. And when at last the

¹ Nottingham.

gates were thrown open to the slow-moving train, and the farmers and their wives passed in and knew that they and their children were saved, with what heartfelt ejaculations of praise would they thank the Giver of all good !

“Thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise,” is, then, a sentence which has a meaning even for us when once we think of it and try to recover its meaning. But it must have had a still keener and happier significance to the men of Isaiah’s day ; for they were constantly exposed to the perils of war and invasion. There was *no* safety for them except in the defenced cities, and even the strongest of these cities had often proved an insufficient defence. They knew what it was to see a land laid waste by a merciless foe who dishonoured its women, slew every male capable of bearing arms, carried its children away captive to a foreign shore, seized on all its portable treasures, and burned and destroyed whatever could not be carried off.

Nay, more ; the men to whom this promise was addressed were themselves captives and slaves in a foreign land. They, or their fathers, had passed through the horrors of an invasion such as I have just described. There had been no safety, no refuge, for them in any city, however high its walls, however strong its gates ; no, not even in Jerusalem itself, although both Nature and Art had done their best to make it impregnable. Even this holy and beautiful city, as strong as it was fair, had been destroyed, its walls battered down, its gates blackened with fire.

To men in such hard conditions, and with such bitter memories behind them, what promise could be more welcome, or more inspiring, than that which the Prophet gave them? the promise that they should be led back to their native country and rebuild their beautiful city; and that, when once they were restored to their ancestral home, Violence should no more be heard in their land, nor Wasting and Destruction in their borders; that the governor of the new city and commonwealth should be Peace, their magistrates Righteousness; and that, gratefully conscious of their security and joy, in their freedom from all danger and all fear, they should call their walls Salvation and their gates Praise.

But *when* was this gracious promise to be fulfilled? when did the Prophet *expect* to see it fulfilled?

Doubtless he expected that it would have a partial fulfilment when the Jewish captives were restored to the land of their fathers, and their feet stood within the gates of the new Jerusalem, "builded as a city that is compact together." And in some measure, in so far as they would permit, it was fulfilled in their experience. Their governor, Ezra, was a man of peace. Their chief magistrate, Nehemiah, was a friend and servant of righteousness. And though the tribes and nations around them raged against them, and took counsel together how they might destroy them, yet again and again, because God was with them, their wall was their salvation, and songs of deliverance were heard in their gates. If the fulness of the promised blessing never came upon them, it was because they would not fulfil the inevitable con-

ditions of the promise ; because they did not love righteousness, because they did not seek peace and pursue it, because they would not have God and the servants of God to reign over them.

Nor can we suppose that *a prophet* was looking forward only or mainly to the outward and temporary conditions of his people. He was looking chiefly to their inward and spiritual estate, after the manner of a prophet. From the time when God had said to Abram, "I am thy shield, and thine exceeding great reward," the prophetic souls in Israel, musing on things to come, had habitually anticipated a time when "all the people" should be lovers of righteousness and lovers of peace ; a time, therefore, in which God would be their shield and their salvation, whatever the dangers to which they might be exposed, and would make them rich whatever they lost. Like Abraham, too, they had learned from the very disappointment of their earthly hopes to look for a better country, a better city, even a heavenly—a home and city of the soul, in which the righteous would dwell secure through all the changes and alarms whether of life or of death. And, hence, through all the Christian centuries, Isaiah's promise has been read, and justly read, as more than a promise to the Jews, as a promise to all men, as pointing onward to the kingdom of Christ, that most true home and refuge of every righteous soul, that secure asylum for the lovers and makers of peace.

The promise is *for us*, therefore, and for our children. It may have, it is having, a present fulfilment. For

some of us have learned already, and others are beginning to learn that, if we seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all other things will be added unto us according to our need of them. We have learned, or we are beginning to learn, that in every age, here as well as hereafter, if men are really lovers of righteousness and lovers of peace, God is in very deed their Refuge and will become their Song. We do not ask, we do not expect, to dwell in a fortified city which no adversary, or apparent adversary, can approach, to sit within gates and behind walls which will secure us from every stroke of change and sorrow and loss. God has provided some better thing for us than that. He *Himself* has become our Salvation and our Shield ; He who can compel every change to minister to our welfare, turn all our sorrows into joy, and teach us to find in every loss not simply a gain to match, but an exceeding great gain. For such creatures as we are, in such a world as this, to be put beyond the reach of loss and grief and change would be but a doubtful good ; nay, it would be a very obvious and indubitable harm, for it would rob us of the very discipline by which we are confirmed in righteousness, and driven to seek for peace, not in the fluctuating and transitory conditions of outward life, but in the quiet and indisturbable depths of a soul stayed on God and conformed to his will. And who can doubt that it is good for us to know that we are secure *amid* the shocks of change, the blows of loss, the chastisements of grief—know that none of these things can by any means harm us, that they can only

minister to our welfare, since they are all the servants of Him in whom we put our trust.

This has been the stay and refuge, the home and citadel, of the soul to all holy and prophetic spirits since the world began, however differently they may have conceived or expressed it. And it is as open to us as it was to them. It stands wider open for most of us than it did for most of them, since Christ came to be a new and broader way, a new and larger door, both into heaven itself and into the kingdom of heaven on earth. Why, then, should we not enter into it and dwell in a songful security? Our fathers, the patriarchs and prophets, trusted in Him, and were not put to shame. And if we cannot learn from the life of Christ, and from his death, and from his triumph over death, that God is a sufficient Stay and Support of the soul under all the vicissitudes of time, whence could we learn that happy lesson? Once in this heavenly City and Citadel, we have nothing more to fear, could we but believe it. "Who shall harm you," demands the Apostle, "if ye be followers of that which is good?" And may not we, with much more reason, demand, Who or what can harm us if we have *found* that which is good, if we are under the shield of Him without whom nothing is holy, nothing strong? Once in Him, all things are ours, because all are his, life and death, things present and things to come. God Himself has become our Salvation and our Strength: and if our walls are Salvation, should not our gates be Praise?

Rightly read, then, read in the sunshine of that Gospel

which was revealed to patriarch and prophet but is much more fully revealed to us, these ancient words of promise throw a bright flood of hope over our life, the life that now is, the life we live in the flesh. They teach us where we may find an impregnable and fearless Security amid all the insecurities of time, where we may find a Joy unspeakable and inexhaustible amid all its sorrows, where we may find a sacred and unbroken Peace amid all its conflicts and cares. Grasp the promise, adventure yourselves upon it, commit yourselves to it, and the God who is your Salvation, whether you know it or not, will become your Praise, because you know that He has saved you from your anxieties and fears in saving you from your sins.

This I take to be, not the meaning only, but the deepest and richest meaning of our Promise, because it is the most inward and spiritual; *viz.*, that always and everywhere, through all the years of time and through all the æons of eternity, God Himself will be the home, strength, and joy of the soul that trusts in Him. But because many of us, because at times we all, ask a little impatiently, "Is this inward and spiritual fact never to clothe itself in an outward and substantial form? Are we never to reach a country in which Violence shall no more be heard and Wasting and Destruction shall be unknown, or a city, the walls of which shall be Salvation and its gates Praise, because its governor is Peace and its magistrates Righteousness?" let me, in conclusion, remind you that St. John takes up the wondrous tale sung by Isaiah, and carries it to a still

more wondrous close. As he gazes upon the new heaven and the new earth which are to succeed the dissolution of all things, "I saw," he says, "the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great Voice out of the throne, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And he shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death shall be no more; neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain any more: for the former things are passed away." And he goes on, as you know, to describe the heavenly city and home in figures drawn from all that is most precious and beautiful and splendid among the former things—from fountains and rivers, trees and mountains, gold and gems, sun and moon—pressing them all into his service as he labours to depict the pure and glorious conditions of the life of the new city in the new world. No doubt he has to set forth things which the eye hath not seen, nor can see—things invisible because eternal. And yet who can read his words, glowing with colour, radiant with light, without becoming aware that he is predicting an utter and most blessed change in all our outward conditions; looking forward, and teaching us to look forward, to a time when the inward refuge and strength of our souls will take on sensible yet enduring forms; when all that now veils our eyes and limits our thoughts shall have passed away, and we shall *see* Him in whom we have believed,

see and know Him for our Saviour and our Strength and our Joy, and so be delivered once for all from sorrow and change, loss and fear and death.

Whatever his symbols mean, and however they need to be qualified, they must mean something, and must mean something more and better than we are now able to conceive. As yet we cannot tell all that may be implied in the wall of jasper, "great and high," on whose twelve foundations are inscribed the names of the twelve Apostles of the Lamb; or in the twelve gates, each a pearl, guarded by angels, and bearing the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. But so much as this we can make out, that our future life is to contain the ultimate fulfilment of all the high and priceless gifts which God has bestowed on men here, whether in Nature or Art, whether in the Gospel or the Law. And of this at least we may be sure, that, when we stand within those gates and are defended by that wall, we shall find new and nobler reasons for calling our wall Salvation and our gates Praise. Nay, I think we may even be sure that to breathe the pure air, and drink the sweet water, and eat the living fruit of that city and garden of the soul, to walk in golden streets transparent as glass, and to abide within its fair gates and gleaming walls, cannot mean less than this: that all the outward conditions of our life will be pure and sweet and wholesome; that our service will be marred by no weakness, hampered by no limits save those of nature and capacity; that our trust will be fretted by no fear, our joy soiled by no taint; that whatever will contribute to our

personal culture or to the ordered magnificence of our common and public life will be at our command; and that no cloud of change or fear, tumult or strife, will ever more vex our peace.

Here, then, is a word of God which may have had little meaning for some of us hitherto, or even no meaning at all. And yet how full it is of inspiration and hope! How much it means, how far it casts its rays! What a brightness it sheds upon both our present and our future life! How it helps us to meet and bear the strokes we most dread—the strokes of loss and grief and change! How it comforts us concerning our dead who have died in the Lord! And there are a thousand such bright and hopeful words in the Bible would we but observingly seek them out—words which could hardly fail to bring us, as I trust this word may bring you, consolation under all our trials, strength for all duties, courage and hope for all the days and ages to come.

VIII.

NOR ANY OTHER CREATION.

“Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creation, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”—ROMANS viii. 39.

TWENTY years ago or more, when I first ventured to alter a few words in reading the lessons of the day, and had substituted the word “creation” for the word “creature” in the 19th, 20th, and 21st verses of this Chapter, a good old man rose at a meeting of the Church and, with a brow of grave rebuke, demanded what Bible it was that I had introduced into the pulpit, and by what authority I had introduced it. When I replied that, purely on my own authority, I had deviated here and there from our Authorized Version in order to represent the original Greek a little more faithfully, it soon became apparent that on this point he was impervious to argument, and must be quietly brushed on one side. “What did he care for the Greek? He wanted the mind of the Spirit;” and the mind of the Spirit was to be found only in our noble but faulty translation. But, to-day, no one would think of taking

the objection which it was very natural for him to take then. Or if any old man, clinging to the prejudices of bygone years, were to take it, his very grandchildren would rise up against him, and point out that this alteration had been made in our Revised Version, and was approved by the best authorities.

Yet, while our Revisers had the courage of their scholarship in dealing with Verses 19-21, that courage seems to have failed them in dealing with this 39th Verse, where the same Greek word is used, and where therefore it should, by their own rule, be rendered by the same English word. Instead of putting "nor any other *creation*" into the text, they have banished the word "creation" into the margin, and retained the word "creature" in the text, although every one must admit that between a single creature and a whole creation there is a considerable, and even an enormous, difference. They took this course, I apprehend, however, not so much through lack of courage as from the fear of becoming unintelligible, or perhaps because they had no clear, or no unanimous, conception of what the Apostle meant when he declared that no other or different creation to this would be able to separate us from the love of God as revealed in and by Christ Jesus our Lord. And indeed if they *had* put the right word ("creation") into the text, what do you suppose the ordinary reader of the New Testament would have made of it? What would *you* have made of it? Even if you had consulted the commentators you would have found that most of them assume St. Paul's phrase to be nothing more

than a rhetorical and sublime *et cetera* ; that when, after enumerating certain great forces which, despite their greatness, would be unable to separate us from the love of God, the Apostle added, " nor will any other *creation* ; " he was not rising to the climax of his impassioned affirmation, but was simply asserting that " nothing else," no other and similar force, would ever succeed in detaching us from that love.

Now even if we take it thus, even if we find in his words no more than a simple denial that any conceivable force or being will ever divide us from God and God's love, they have a very noble meaning for us, and, if we can believe them, will yield us a sovereign consolation and support under all the changes of time and all the fluctuating emotions which those changes breed in our hearts. But is there any reason why we should not find in them a much more clear and definite conception than this, and therefore a much more sustaining and consolatory assurance ? I think not. I think there are two senses in which St. Paul may have used the word " creation " here ; that we may take it in both these senses ; and that, instead of regarding this pregnant phrase as a mere *et cetera*, however sublime, we may find in it a very true and noble climax to his impassioned asseveration.

I. First of all, he may use the word " creation " here, as he uses it elsewhere, in an imaginative but most true sense ; as when, for example, he speaks of the kingdom of Christ as " a new creation," and declares that to the believer in Christ " all things become new." When we

read such phrases as these, or when in the Hebrew poets and prophets we read of the heaven and the earth passing away before the advent of the Lord, or being folded up like a scroll which has no further meaning or use, we are apt to regard them as mere poetry, or, at best, as poetic exaggerations of facts capable of being stated in a much more cool and reasonable form. And yet this language is not peculiar to the Bible ; it is as common outside the covers of the Bible as within them ; and the validity of it is confirmed by the whole history of human thought no less than by our private experience. Philosophy has always affirmed that what we call the real universe has no existence save in the mind of man, which alone gives it its unity ; that even Time and Space are but necessary forms and conditions of all our thinking. Science affirms that the heavens and the earth are what we make them to be, and that, with every great revolution of human thought, they are made anew. And, *to us* at least, they must be what we conceive them to be, must take their form and colour from the eyes with which we view them. Have we not been living under a new heaven—a heaven new to man—since Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler, Newton, discovered the true theory of the relations and motions of the heavenly bodies ? Has not the earth become a new earth to us since the geologists ran back its history through countless myriads of centuries, and since Darwin has taught us to see the law of evolution at work through the whole long ascending scale of life ? Do not the heavens and the earth present themselves to

us in new forms of beauty and power, not only when knowledge enables us to look on them with other larger eyes, but also whenever any great and inwardly-transforming passion is kindled in our hearts ?

Why, then, should not Paul employ the language which all men—from the lover to the philosopher—employ when he set himself to describe the profoundest revolution which ever swept through the heart and mind of man ? When, for him, the Judge of the Jews was transformed into the Father and Saviour of all mankind, and the stern rigid code under which he had lived, or under which rather he had sought shelter from death, a code obedience to which, even if possible, made no man righteous and good — when this hard code of threatening precepts was displaced by the law of liberty and love, to obey which *is* righteousness and health and peace, did he not tread a new earth and gaze up into a new heaven ? And when the faith he taught conquered the wicked ancient world, did not all men confess that all things were then made new ? Do not we ourselves mark the Christian era as the boundary line between the old world and the new, and begin to count the world's age afresh from the day on which Christ was born ? Yet many a pious Jew must have thought that the end, rather than the beginning, of the world had come when the Jewish polity passed away, and that true religion had abandoned a race which had adjudged itself unworthy of eternal life ? “No,” says St. Paul, “the world has *not* come to an end ; men are *not* separated from God. It is a new world, a new creation, that has come,

a world in which men are brought nigh to God, so nigh that no future change, no revolution in human thought, shall ever separate them from Him. The Cross, once erected on the earth, will not pass away, or be made of none effect, even though the earth on which it stood should pass away and be no more seen.

Has not his assurance been verified, and that again and again ? It was not long before the simplicity of the victorious Church was corrupted, and Christ was crucified afresh, in the house of his friends. All the elements of the old Hebrew, and even of the old pagan and barbaric, faiths gradually crept into its dogmas and ceremonies, its feasts and fasts, and, above all, into the daily conduct of life ; until, in the dark ages as we call them, the leading races of Europe were in bondage to a system as vile, as cruel and degrading, as fatal to righteousness and love, as any that obtained in the elder world, and the arch-priest of Christendom, its spiritual father and guide, was simply a more accomplished and licentious Pagan than had ever been seen outside the pale. Then came the Reformation—a partial, and only a partial, return to the faith and charity of the primitive times ; and yet a change so great that to those who submitted to it all things in very deed became new ; while many a pious soul, withdrawn from the world and uncorrupted by the corruptions of the Church, mourned over it as a proof that faith had left the earth, and deemed that religion itself was sickening for death when it was really clothing itself with new power.

Nay, has there not been a similar radical change

even in our own time, a change as welcome to all lovers of a free, reasonable, and spiritual faith, and as alarming to all who cling to old use and wont, and to the established order of things, however corrupt and effete that order may be? Just as in medicine the old vigorous and drastic practice which bled and blistered and cauterized or dosed men with horrible drugs, which killed or cured, and killed oftener than it cured, while its very cures often entailed life-long forms of infirmity and disease; just as that old system of medicine has yielded to the new practice which aims at aiding nature rather than compelling her, and seeks above all to alleviate the sufferings of its patients, instead of adding to them; so, even in the last twenty or thirty years, the old drastic and caustic method of theology has given place to a new method, to a more generous and gentle practice.¹ In general we may say that the old method of theology was arbitrary, harsh, violent. Revelation was opposed to reason. Assent to creeds was substituted for the faith that works by love. Morality, apart from religion, was capable of producing nothing but "splendid sins." Good works were "filthy rags." Men were bound to believe, though they could not believe unto life, unless they were "elected unto grace," and renewed by a spirit which "bloweth where it listeth." To save one's own soul—*i.e.*, to live for one's self—was the supreme duty, and men

¹ Dr. John Service works out the parallel between the old and new systems of Medicine and Theology admirably in his Discourse on "Methods of Spiritual Treatment," to which I owe much of this paragraph.

were most likely to win heaven by renouncing the earth. Instead of being urged to love our neighbours as ourselves, we were warned that if we loved our nearest neighbour half as much as we loved ourselves we might provoke the Lord to jealousy and move Him to take away the wife, the husband, the child who had grown too dear to us. The horrors of hell and damnation were freely denounced wherever two or three met together in the name of the merciful Son of Man. Ecclesiastical duties usurped the place of ethical, and we were exhorted, above all things, to attend punctually on ordinances of worship, to observe sacraments, and to contribute liberally to the funds of the Church. A sad countenance was a sign of grace, especially on Sundays; and a merry heart was a portent of reprobation.

From thirty to forty years ago this was the tone of the teaching which I heard every Lord's day: and no doubt many of you can remember hearing it too. But who hears such teaching to-day? There is hardly an intelligent congregation in England, I suppose, that would endure it. Even those who have not embraced the new theology have so largely modified the old, and insist so little on dogmas which were once for ever in their mouths, that it is no longer the same: it is new in tone and spirit even when it is not new in form—to the grave distress of a few faithful but ignorant souls who think every change must be change for the worse, and cannot be brought to believe that the new theological heaven is broader and brighter than the old, and the new theological earth at once more fruitful and more fair.

Well, there is comfort even for *them* in the assurance of St. Paul that no other creation, however novel and unwelcome, can possibly separate them from the love of God in Christ Jesus ; and surely if *they* are not separated from his love, they need not mourn because those whom they distrust and condemn are learning to trust in that love too, and to hope that it spreads wider and lasts longer than they have been wont to imagine.

But if there is comfort for us in St. Paul's assurance, there is also rebuke. *He* was fully persuaded that neither death, nor even life, neither things present nor things to come, neither the angels nor principalities of the Hebrew heaven, nor the height and depth of Greek philosophy, could ever injure the vital substance of the Christian Faith ; no, nor any other "creation" which might flash on an astonished world, any future change and revolution whether in the estate or in the thoughts of men. And yet, how little makes *us* afraid—afraid lest what we believe should not prove to be true ; afraid that, great as truth is, it will not prevail over error ; afraid that, though we know and believe the love which God hath toward us, something may still happen to remove us from his love ; afraid that the fatherly and redeeming love for all men which God has revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord may somehow fail of its end after all, and leave myriads on myriads of our fellows in the outer darkness of a sinful and alienated life ! So ingenious are we in tormenting ourselves that at times we fear what may come of the very movement of thought which has brought both us and many more a new

heaven and a new earth. For it must be confessed that we owe the last revolution which has raised and broadened our religious habits of thought and feeling not so much to theologians as to men of science, and to the new spirit and method of looking at all things which they have introduced among us. And now—weak and faithless that we are!—we begin to be a little uneasy, and to ask whereunto this thing may grow: while some of us even forbode at times that it may separate others, if not ourselves, from the faith and service of Christ. Has God, then, brought the world so far on its way, only to let it fall back at last into the darkness of irreligion and unbelief? Is it his *way* to turn a blessing into a curse? Is it not, rather, his way to overcome evil with good? Let us trust Him whom we and our fathers have so often proved, and cherish the persuasion of St. Paul that, neither this new creation nor any other that may come, that no force on earth or in heaven, in time or eternity, is able to cope with that supreme force—the love of God for man.

II. Secondly and finally: There is another sense in which St. Paul uses this word elsewhere, and may use it here. Beyond all secular changes he looked for a final change—the last that he could see; a change in which the present physical framework of the universe would either pass away, or pass into forms so new and strange, that it would no longer be, in any reasonable sense, the same. Our modern science, as I need hardly remind you, also anticipates the very change for which he looked, though Science thinks the change may be an

end, while the Apostle was sure that it would be a beginning as well as an end. Beyond the old heaven and earth, he saw a new heaven and a new earth, free from all defect and bondage and stain, free from all that renders it hostile or unpliant to the spirit of man. In short, he looked, as he tells us in this Chapter, for a renovated universe which should be the fitting home of a renewed, enfranchised, and glorified humanity ; or, to use his own words, he looked for the manifestation of the sons of God in a creation no longer subject to vanity and corruption.

With this grand and illuminating hope full in mind, he surely must have meant to assure us, in my text, that even in that new world as in all which precede it, even in that estate as in all previous estates in which men shall have been found, it will be impossible to separate us from the love of God ; or even to separate us *from the forms and manifestations of that love which we connect with the name of Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Now in Christ Jesus the Divine Love reveals itself as a seeking and redeeming love ; it manifests itself in all forms of grace and compassion. It is, then, from *this* form, from this seeking and redeeming operation of the Divine Love, that we cannot be separated ; no, not even when we reach what we call our last end, or our last estate. Not only must God our Father still love us even there, but God our Saviour must still seek us—seek us by those judgments which are the severer forms and disciplines of his mercy, if that still be necessary, but ever in some form seek us, until He find us, and make

us worthy to abide with Him, capable of reflecting the glory of his goodness and of responding to every touch and impact of his love.

And we have only to reflect that what the eternal God is at any moment, *that* He is and must be always, to be sure that even *this* is true, that even the light of this great hope is light from heaven. The Cross itself is only a revelation of the Love that is always seeking men, always suffering in their sins and the miseries bred by sin, always at work for their salvation unto righteousness, always moving and imploring them to return to Him that He may bless them and do them good in turning them away from their sins. So that even if, as some suppose, Heaven be built on Hell, God must still remain what He is, a just God and yet a Saviour. *He* cannot change, whatever changes. He cannot deny Himself because we deny or resist Him. And since He is love, and nothing can separate us from his love, even in Hell there must be stairs that slope through darkness into light ; and the very miseries which avenge sin must be the ministers of a love that does not die even when we die, and which will never suffer us to die, though, for our redemption, it may permit us to endure sufferings worse than death. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, things present nor things to come, nor any other change of state or condition, is able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

IX.

THE LAW OF RETRIBUTION.

“I, the Lord, search the heart, I try the reins, to give every man according to his way, according to the fruit of his doings.”—
JEREMIAH xvii. 10.

IN this verse the Prophet answers a question asked in the previous verse. That verse has been much misread, and is perpetually cited as a proof of the utter and universal depravity of man. It should be read, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and mortally sick : who can know it ?” And it is open to doubt whether we are justified in taking it as a general reflection, whether the Prophet meant more than to assert that the heart *of that sinful generation of Jews*, whose doom he was sent to foretell, was for ever fooling and betraying them. But if we take it as a general reflection, it certainly means no more than this : “Of all things under the sun the human heart is the most subtle and crafty. It is so subtle as to persuade men that they are doing that which is right, or even noble and brave, when they are really doing that which is wrong and cowardly and ignoble. It is so subtle that men are an inscrutable

mystery to themselves, as well as to their neighbours. And I, Jeremiah, know no cure for this subtlety—so ingrained is it, so evasive, so difficult to seize, so irresponsible even to the wisest treatment. It is so subtle that no man knows his neighbour's heart, nor even his own. Who, then, *can* know it? Who can look sheer through all its masks and veils, hunt it through all its doublings, and compel it to submit to the curative process it so sorely needs?"

Then comes the answer of my text. *God* can, though none but He. *God does*. He searches the heart to its very depths, seizes it in his medicinal hands, and administers a course of retributive discipline by which its native and inbred subtlety is strained out of it.

It is the Law of Retribution of which this verse treats, therefore: and of this Law it gives us a singularly full and complete expression. But on one point, as you will see, it is indefinite. It fixes no date. It does not tell us *when* every man is to receive according to his way, or even whether it is to be in this life or in that which is to come. In other Scriptures, however, we are taught that the law which requites the evil that men do with evil, and the good they do with good, holds both in this world and in the next. And, so soon as we reflect on it, we see that the teaching of Scripture is confirmed both by reason and conscience. There have been times in the history of the world, indeed, when men felt no need of another world to correct and balance this, when they believed that here and now every man received the due reward of his deeds. The Friends of Job, for

example, held this creed, and maintained it in the teeth of facts which gave it the lie. Job himself held it once, and was only driven from it to a wider creed, and a larger hope, by the unmerited suffering and the unprovoked shame which rendered it incredible. Many of the psalmists and prophets of Israel, like the vast majority of Gentile moralists, affirmed the law of retribution to be a law of human life. The only question is whether or not the law has sufficient scope to work itself out to its proper and complete issues within the brief space allotted to us here. On the whole, in the long run, men *do*, as a rule, get what they deserve, though not *all* that they deserve. It is true, on the whole, that virtue, and still more godliness, with its interior benefactions, its inward and Divine support, and its bright sustaining hopes, is profitable for the life that now is, even though it should not secure us health, or wealth, or the good-will of men. And it is equally true that vice and irreligion entail loss and suffering even on the most prosperous sinner—lowering his character, bringing him into bondage to his baser passions and his sordid cravings, and sometimes afflicting him with the terrors of a haunted and apprehensive conscience. But, in an evil world, even virtue and godliness often bring a man loss and pain, and expose him to the general dislike and contempt. And, in such a world, though some sinners fall at once into the hands of their sins, judgment treading on the very heels of offence, yet others, less sensitive—more lucky, as they think, more miserable, as we know—or perhaps only

more bold and insolent, often escape the pursuit of vengeance for a time, and even to a point that lies beyond the bounds of time. The Nemesis of human experience is no swift-footed Camilla of the plains, but a halting and slow-paced deity whom the quick-heeled and confident sinner may outrun, at least until he rushes into the arms of death.

In short—for this is the point to which I wish to lead you—if we try to take a large and reasonable view of the facts of human life, and listen impartially to what they say of this Divine law of retribution, we find so many good men and so many bad men who, so long as we can see them, by no means receive the due and full reward of their deeds that, like Job, we are driven by the inequalities of this life to demand a future life. Since, obviously, this life is not purely retributive, we look for a retributive life to come. The evil that men do lives after them: and are they to escape even the tardiest issues of the evil they have done? The good that men do is often ill-rewarded while they are with us; but this, too, lives after them, lives even longer than evil, and works on to larger and happier results: and if retribution be a law of the universe, must not *they* live on, to inherit even the latest and sweetest results of their labours? Justice itself calls imperatively for a life beyond these mortal limits, and freed from the inequalities and imperfections of our present conditions. And I do not see how any lover of justice, how any man who believes that the Judge of all the earth must do us right, can be content to believe either that he shall

escape a future discipline which will strip every remnant of evil and imperfection from him, or that he shall fail to be admitted to an equal and propitious world in which the results of any good he has been able to do on earth will strengthen and equip him for doing more and greater good, and for doing it more freely and happily.

This, then, is our first gain from the Law of Retribution as stated in the text. We have got from it an argument for a future life which is wholly independent of the teaching of Scripture, but which is yet in the most perfect accord with that teaching. All men admit that they *do*, or *ought* to, receive the fruit of their doings. Jeremiah says that they *must* and *will*; but he does not say *when* they will receive it. Experience and observation convince us that they do not always receive it *here*. And our sense of justice craves and demands, therefore, *a hereafter* in which they may and will receive it.

Three other points are touched by this verse. First, the Prophet states the law of retribution in the simplest form: every man will get "*according to his way.*" Secondly, he depicts this law as cumulative in its action and effects: every man will get "*according to the fruit of his doings,*" *i.e.*, according, not simply to his deeds alone, but also to all that they have brought forth. And, thirdly, he teaches us that in administering this law, the Divine Judge of men will not "square his guess with" the mere "shows" of our life, will not infer its true meaning and bent from our merely outward actions, but will look for it in the most inward and secret

fountains of thought and affection : "*I, the Lord search the heart, and try the reins.*"

1. Jeremiah's statement of the Law of Retribution is very simple, and need not detain us long. Every man, he says, is to receive according to his *way*; for the word is singular in the Original, not plural—"way" not "ways." And this word denotes, primarily, the general course and tenour of a man's life, but, more commonly and specifically, the character formed in him by the acts and habits of his life. So that what the Prophet really affirms is, that our character must and will determine our destiny; that we shall arrive, at last, at the place and state to which the course or path we have chosen naturally conducts.

Now all the world will admit that this is true in part, and ought to be even more true than it is. That is to say, we all recognize, in our own experience and in that of other men, that our actions, whether virtuous or vicious, righteous or sinful—whatever their moral complexion, indeed—tend to perpetuate themselves, to grow into habits, to form our character. We all confess that a man who does right in scorn of consequence, and who thus forms habits of virtue and goodness, is a better, and on the whole a happier, man than he who is indifferent to the moral colour and tone of his actions and habits, who, to gain the ends of the moment, will take a dishonest or an immoral course. We all confess that "it is the nature of sin to entail suffering, and to work itself, as an element of punishment, into all the complicated web of human existence." We cannot say that every good

man meets a due and immediate reward of his goodness, or that every sinner meets an instant and adequate punishment of his sin. We acknowledge that so far as we can see—though, probably, these exceptions are much fewer than we suppose—some good men suffer for their goodness to the end of their days, and that some bad men either do not eat the fruit of their doings, or, so far as we can judge, do not taste its bitterness. But, despite all this, we can honestly say that the constitution of our nature and of the world around us is such that there is a tendency in them, a strong and constant tendency, to bring well-being and peace to the man who works righteousness, and to bring misery and shame to the man who does evil. In other words, we affirm that the moral character of a man *does*, on the whole, determine his destiny ; that the law of retribution *is* at work on human life, although for the present it works, or seems to work, obscurely and imperfectly. This is the rule ; and we cannot lament even that there are exceptions to it, exceptions sufficiently numerous and weighty to compel us to look for another life in which our welfare, our destiny, will be more exactly adjusted to our character and our deserts.

2. So far, I think, we can go with the Prophet, and go honestly and heartily. On the whole, men do receive according to their *way* ; and it will be but just if hereafter, their circumstances and conditions should answer still more closely to the course they have taken and the character they have formed. Nor, I apprehend, shall we find any difficulty in taking a second step with

him. For when he says that God gives and will give to every man according to *the fruit* of his doings, he does but use a figure which pervades the whole Bible. The Bible everywhere describes men as reaping what they sow, and as receiving again, not the bare seed sown, but the harvest of their actions. And, when we test this common and pervading metaphor by our experience, we find it true. Our actions *are* fertile, and we do have to eat the fruit they yield. Every time we take a decisive and deliberate step, we set forces in motion which soon slip from our control. But it is *we* who have set them going, and we are held responsible for whatever effects they produce. If you throw a stone into the air, you may mean no harm, or only a little harm ; but you may do a great injury. And when the harm is done, you cannot turn lightly away and say, "It was none of my doing." It *was* your doing, even if it went beyond your intention, and you have to pay the penalty of it ; you have to eat the fruit of your deed. If in the charm of bright social intercourse, or to relieve the gloom of depression, you take too much wine, you may have had no distinctly bad motive for it ; your motive may have been nothing more than a friendly wish to share and promote the hilarity of the hour, or to free yourself from the disabling effects of a transient incapacity for a task you felt bound to do : but if that indulgence should excite a growing craving for similar indulgences, as in some natures it will, and you sink into a sot, and your health flies, and your business goes to rack, and your domestic peace is broken up, you

cannot plead, "I did not do it." You *did* do it, and the world fairly holds you responsible for all that has come of it. Or, to take a still sadder and more perplexing instance, if, out of mere thoughtless hospitality, you press a man to drink with you, and he sets out by your prompting on the perilous and slippery path which leads him to the madhouse or to a dishonoured grave, you cannot escape the consequences of your own act; you have to bear all the misery of witnessing his downfall, and of the heartrending fear that, but for you, he might never have fallen.

Do you not see, then, how the results of our bad, and even of our thoughtless, actions accumulate upon us, multiplying sometimes in a geometrical ratio, and landing us in the most awful responsibilities? And can you doubt that, in like manner, the results of our good deeds multiply and accumulate? If a man cultivate any faculty, that of learning languages, for example, or of written composition, or of public speaking, who can say whereunto it will grow, what nutriment it will meet from the most unexpected quarters, how one opportunity will open the door for another, and one success pave the way for a dozen more? If you once brace yourself to a good deed which involves thought and labour and self-sacrifice, do not all similar deeds become easier to you? Does not even one good deed induce your neighbours to ask your help in other good deeds, and thus furnish you with ever new opportunities of service? Does not your example stimulate and encourage *them* in the good works they have in hand, or now and then even rouse

the indolent and indifferent to interest and activity? Do not those who benefit by your kindness at least sometimes remember and imitate it? Have you yourselves never been constrained to help a neighbour by a recollection of how, when you once needed similar help, some good man or woman came to your assistance? A good deed shines, we are told, "like a candle in this naughty world." And how many solitary and forlorn wayfarers, stumbling in the dark, may even one such candle, shining through a cottage casement, serve to guide, to stimulate, to console?

We *do* get according to our deeds, then, and, through the mercy of God, we get, in addition, all the fruit our deeds bring forth. And if, in the world to come, the consequences of our deeds, even to the last, should more largely come upon us, we cannot deny that this, too, will be just.

3. But in the future at all events, and far more largely than in the present, the law of retribution *will* work, the consequences of our actions will come home to us, according to the infinite wisdom and compassion of God. Then, if not now, God will deal with us, not according to the outward form and appearance of our conduct, but according to those inward springs of thought, will, emotion, purpose, of which our life is at best but a poor and inadequate outcome, a pale and distorted reflection. He will search the inmost fibres of our hearts in order that He may mete out to us the recompense we deserve, the discipline we require; in order that, to the last fibre of our hearts,

we may be satisfied with the justice and the love of his award.

We must lay some stress on this point, for it contains the key to many of those mysteries of Providence by which we are perplexed. I have just said that, here at least, we have to take the results of any act we do, even though we did not foresee and intend them. The stone you fling into the air for mere pastime, or to relieve the accumulated energy of muscle and nerve, *may* cut out a child's eye, or strike a delicate breast and breed a lingering and fatal disease. The wine you press on a friend in mere careless hospitality may awake a dormant craving which, once roused, will urge him on to shame and ruin. In a thousand different ways the unexpected and unintentional consequences of our deeds come home to us, and come home even unjustly and disproportionately. And it is no answer to our complaint that, in like manner, our worthier actions, our good deeds, are often followed by a train of happy consequences which we neither purposed nor foresaw. For we do not care, whether in reward or in punishment, to be the mere sport of accident. To get more than we feel we deserve is as great an affront to our sense of justice as to lose or suffer more, though it may not be so unwelcome an affront save to those who are nobly attempered and finely strung. Above all things we crave justice, crave that, when we are judged, our purposes and motives should be taken into account.

And there are some the very defects of whose nature make them feel this craving very keenly. For there

are those among us who, through some defect of voice or look, some missing charm of manner, some shyness or awkwardness, can never shew themselves as they are, never push their way upward in the world, never propitiate an instant or win a wide esteem, never say half the kind things they think and feel, never do a service with a grace that will make it tell. And around them they see those, of no bigger brain or better heart than themselves, whose strenuous self-asserting will commands reputation and success, or whose very faces are a letter of commendation, or who by some merely outward grace or charm *tell* instantly on all they meet, and lend a strange virtue to any good deed they do.

We all crave justice, and *these* perhaps the most of all. Be content, my brethren : you shall all *have* justice—hereafter, if not here ; in the life to come, if not in that which now is. God searches the heart ; and one day He will shew all the world what He has found in *your* heart. *He* takes cognizance of the motives and intentions of your acts, as well as of the acts themselves. He judges you by your inward character rather than by your outward manner ; and in due time—as soon, be sure, as it will be quite good for you, He will make his judgment of you felt. You need not fear lest He should fail to do you justice. He will shew you bounty and compassion, as well as justice. All hidden worth will be brought to light, as well as every secret sin ; and you shall have not simply a due, but a full and overdue, reward of all you have done in purpose, in motive, in desire, as well as in deed.

The Lord looketh on the heart—*searcheth* the heart as for treasure hidden from the eyes of man. What better proof or illustration could you have than you may find in Him in whom God was, that He might reconcile the world unto Himself? What treasures of rock-like firmness and constancy Christ discerned under the fluctuating and uncertain disguise which Cephas wore in the hot days of his early manhood; and what cold and calculating policy, what absolute and polished indifference to truth and justice, behind the venerable mask of Caiaphas the Priest! Ah, it is not those who account themselves “sinners,” and whom the world, having first made them what they are, stigmatizes as “sinners above all men,” who have most need to dread the searching inquest of the Judge eternal! For Christ, like God, fixed his eyes, not on the outsides of men, but on that within them which passeth show; and yet it was not the publicans and sinners who feared Him most or had most need to fear Him. They *were* sinners in his sight. They had gone astray, and turned every one to his own way. And their sins were hateful to Him, as all sin is. But He did not condemn *them* as He condemned “the righteous,” the Pharisees who, under the mask of devotion, hid a godless and a selfish heart. Condemn them! He invited and drew them to Him, by shewing them that He could make large allowance for the heady impulses and hard conditions which had led them astray, even while He reproached them for their falls from virtue, their alienation from God: He won them to Himself and to his service by

shewing them that He recognized the goodness, or capabilities of goodness, which had survived their sins. And even the Pharisees—we may be sure that He judged *them* fairly, too ; that He took account of the traditions in which they had been bred, the school in which they had been reared, the narrow conventions and proprieties which were in their very blood, and recognized any germ of sincere piety or genuine charity which had not been wholly starved within them. When we read the parable of the Prodigal Son, we are most moved by the waiting and inextinguishable love of the Father, which rushes out like a flood and carries all before it the moment the poor wanderer, whose heart is famishing for love, returns to him. But I suspect there is a still diviner stroke of pathos in the Parable than even this. For it was surely harder to love the righteous and self-conscious elder brother than to rejoice over him who was lost but is found ; and yet with what a wealth and abandon of love the Father turns to *him* : “ Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine.”

Well, we are all to stand before the judgment seat of Christ. *He* is to be the Judge of quick and dead. Need we fear to meet Him ? *Yes*, and a thousand times *Yes*, if we are still in our sins, loving and cleaving to them : for He will mete out to us according to our deeds, and even according to the manifold results of our deeds. But *No*, a thousand times *No*, if, despite our sins, we have kept some love of goodness alive in our souls, and have confessed and renounced the sins to

which we once clung. *Yes*, and a thousand times *Yes*, if we have hidden a cold, a hard and selfish, heart under the cloak of religious orthodoxy and zeal. But *No*, a thousand times *No*, if, however poor and imperfect our creed, we have cherished love for God and man in our hearts, and, judging ourselves, have not condemned others.

X. AND XI.

THE PRAYER OF THE REMNANT.

1 “O that Thou wouldest rend the heavens, that Thou wouldest
2 come down, that the mountains might quake at thy presence
3 —as when fire kindleth brushwood or causeth water to boil—
4 to make known thy name to thine adversaries, so that nations
5 might tremble at thy presence, when Thou doest terrible
6 things beyond our hope ! O that Thou wouldest come down,
7 that the nations might quake at thy presence ! For from of
8 old men have not heard nor perceived by the ear, neither
9 hath eye seen a God beside Thee who would do gloriously
10 for him that waiteth for Him. Thou meetest him who joy-
11 fully worketh righteousness, who remembereth Thee, walking
12 in thy ways.

13 “Behold, Thou art angry : then have we sinned. Had we
14 continued in thy ways, we had been saved. But we all be-
15 came as one unclean, and all our righteous deeds as a gar-
16 ment soiled with blood. We all faded like the leaves, and
17 our iniquities, like a storm, have carried us away. There
18 was none that called on thy name, that stirred up himself to
19 take hold on Thee. Therefore hast Thou hid thy face from
20 us, and made us to melt away in the hand of our iniquities.

21 “But now, O Lord, Thou art our Father ; we are the clay,
22 and Thou our Maker. Be not very angry, O Lord, neither
23 remember our iniquity for ever. Lo, do but look, we be-
24 seech Thee, we are all thy people. Thy holy cities are a wil-
25 derness ; Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. Our
26 holy and our beautiful house, in which our fathers praised
27 Thee, hath been burned with fire, and all in which we took

- 12 delight hath been laid waste. Wilt Thou, despite all this, refrain Thyself, O Lord? Wilt Thou keep silence, and leave us to suffer unto the uttermost?"—ISAIAH lxiv.

MANY grave critical questions arise as the date and authorship of the last seven and twenty Chapters of the Book of Isaiah are discussed: but these questions, though of great importance from the critical point of view, are of hardly any importance in so far as the meaning and beauty of the Chapters are concerned. Critics of every school combine to praise them as composing at once the most spiritual and one of the most sublime scriptures of the Old Testament, and in affirming that the main drift of them is so obvious that it can hardly be missed. If, then, our heart be set to find the best that these Chapters have to give us, we shall not perplex ourselves with difficult critical questions on which even experts still differ and dispute; we shall rather go straight to their spiritual contents, on the superior and unsurpassed value of which even experts are agreed, and strive to possess ourselves of them. For though the main lines of thought may be too clear to be missed, a little study will be sure to make them more significant and more attractive to us.

If English congregations, or some members of them, were not so impatient of the verse by verse and chapter by chapter method of exposition still in vogue in Scotland, a Preacher could hardly find a nobler or a more instructive task than the methodical exposition of this section of the greatest of the Prophets. I have not the courage to invite you to such a study of twenty-

seven Chapters; but I hope I shall not tax your patience too heavily if I confine myself to one brief Chapter of only twelve verses, and, by discussing even this fragment of a fragment with you, seek to give you some taste of what has been called "the evangel of Isaiah," and "the gospel according to Isaiah."

I have been obliged to retranslate the Chapter before reading it with you; for our Authorized Version—as I daresay everybody will soon know—seldom strays so far from the Original as here, or gives us so many sentences which conceal rather than convey its meaning. Nor is the Chapter easy to translate. For it is charged, and surcharged, with emotion; and profound emotion is apt to overleap the bounds of grammar and syntax, and to express itself with a force and passion, a disregard of rules and restraints which perplex a cool-headed byestander, or even an interested and devout student. Still, any man who has himself been moved by a passion of grief, or hope, or supplication, will find no insuperable difficulty in following the general flow of the Prophet's thought, when once a tolerably correct translation of the Chapter is placed before him.

The Chapter is a Prayer (part of a larger Prayer indeed), a prayer which the Prophet puts into the mouth of the Remnant of Israel which remained faithful to Jehovah under all the miseries of the Captivity. For men who really feared God and trusted in his Word, there never was, I suppose, a more heart-breaking captivity than that of the Jews in Babylon. All the Divine promises seemed to have come to nought, all the rules

and principles of the Divine providence to be broken. Might triumphed over right, brute force over spiritual intelligence and culture. Bonds, stripes, ridicule, and contempt, were the portion of as many as held fast their allegiance to Jehovah, while for as many as renounced Him, and threw in their lot with the Chaldeans, there were all the luxuries of wealth, distinction, power. The great majority of the captives yielded to the temptations of the time, abandoned the God who seemed to have abandoned them, and refused to return from their exile even when God made for them a highway through the desert, and voices from Heaven summoned them to return and come to Zion with songs of joy. Even the most pious hearts, as the slow sad years of exile and captivity dragged on, and no light arose on their darkness, were shot through and through with misgivings and fears, and concluded that their "way was hid from the Lord, and their cause passed over" by their Judge. Still they would not give up their hope in Him. They trusted in Him, though He slew them. And it is into their mouths that the Prophet puts this striking and pathetic prayer.

The Prayer consists of three parts: an Invocation, extending from Verse 1 to Verse 5; a Confession, extending from Verse 5 to the end of Verse 7; and a Supplication, extending from Verse 8 to the close of the Chapter.

I. THE INVOCATION (Verses 1-5). The Chapter opens thus:—"O that Thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might quake at thy presence—as when

fire kindleth brushwood or causeth water to boil—to make known thy Name to thine adversaries, so that nations might tremble at thy presence when Thou doest terrible things beyond our hope! O that Thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might quake at thy presence!”

The general import of this opening invocation is clear ; and there are facts in our common human experience which go far to explain even the form into which it is thrown. For when we are in deep and long-continued misery, we all feel as if God were hidden from us by thick clouds of anger and judgment which we can neither penetrate nor disperse, which must be dispersed *from above*, if they are to be dispersed at all. These clouds must be “rent,” God, our Sun, must shine down, or come down, through them, if the darkness is to be dispelled, if we are to be redeemed from the wasting miseries amid which we sit imprisoned. Hopeless of other relief, we long for his coming, although his advent may be attended by fiery discipline, by judgments that will shake our little world and fill our hearts with awe and fear. Only let the sun break through these hindering clouds, and, though its light may startle us for an instant and its heat scorch us, we shall yet be sure that the hour of our redemption draweth nigh. And we feed our longing for this Divine epiphany by recalling past deliverances well-nigh as wonderful as that for which we now crave, deliverances from a tribulation well-nigh as severe as that by which we are now oppressed.

Our own experience, I say, helps us to interpret the invocation of the Prophet. For what he felt—or, rather,

what *they* felt into whose mouth he put it—was that thick clouds of judgment had been drawn up from the waters of their transgression, and hung over them like an impenetrable pall ; so that they no longer had any access to God, so that many of their fellows had lost all touch with Him, all faith in Him, all trust, all hope. What they, the faithful Remnant, asked was that God would rend these separating clouds asunder, and come down through them, to reknit the broken threads of intercourse, to inspire faith in faithless hearts, and hope in hopeless hearts : while, to strengthen and sustain their souls, to assure themselves that they should *have* what they asked, they looked back and, remembering God's wonders of old, recalled acts of deliverance as signal as any they now desired.

They had already (Chap. lxiii. 15) begged God to “look down” on their miseries ; but now they feel that looking will not be enough. So wide and impassable is the gulf between Him and them, that He must “*come down*” to them. There must be a new revelation of his power and grace as marked and wonderful as that of Sinai, when the vast solid mountain trembled and smoked at his presence, if Israel is to be redeemed from its miseries, if its indifference is to be melted into love, if its distrust and unbelief are to be replaced by faith.

How profoundly this new revelation of Divine power and grace was desired is evinced by the repetition, in Verse 3, of the opening phrase of the Invocation, “O that Thou wouldest come down, that the mountains

might quake at thy presence!" And it is a curious instance of the prosaic and incompetent temperament which some of our commentators bring to the study of the most poetical passages of the Bible, that one or two of our ablest scholars, in the teeth of all evidence, assume this repetition to be an accident and mistake of the transcribers, and think the passage would gain much by its removal! To us, on the contrary, it seems beyond all measure astonishing that men so accomplished should be so ignorant or forgetful of the way in which deep emotion is wont to repeat itself, so insensible to the moral significance and the literary beauty which this repetition throws into the aspiration of the Prophet. For there is no one of you, I suppose, who does not feel how much the passage would *lose* were this appropriate iteration omitted, how impressively and pathetically it rounds off the Prophet's sentence.

In Verse 2, however, there is a real difficulty in determining the exact thought in the Prophet's mind. For, here, he flings in a parenthesis so charged with emotion, and so condensed and abrupt in form, that it is capable of more interpretations than one. By the words, "*As when fire kindleth brushwood or causeth water to boil,*" he may mean to ask that God would come as rapidly as fire spreads in brushwood, or makes water to boil; or he may mean only to imply that, at the advent of the Lord, the mountains would quake and reel as they seem to do under the stress of a storm, when their forests, kindled by lightning, roar in the flame, and their lakes boil and smoke with the fervent heat.

But in whatever form he may have conceived the approaching advent of God, there can be no doubt as to the object of that Divine epiphany. He expressly tells us that that object would be, *to make known thy Name—i.e., to make known the true character of God—to the adversaries of Israel.* They had conceived of Him as powerless to help and defend his people, as having abandoned them to their miseries and forgotten to be gracious to them. The Prophet prays that they may be taught to know Him as He is; not as powerless, but as almighty; not as abandoning his servants even to the miseries they had themselves provoked, but as in the midst of judgment remembering mercy, and as causing mercy to rejoice over judgment. With the catholic temper common to the Hebrew prophets, he is concerned for the instruction and salvation, not of Israel alone, but also of the nations that oppress Israel. And, hence he asks that God's Name, *i.e., God's essential character*, may be made known to them; asks that, as Moses himself trembled with the trembling mount, so, when the Lord once more appears to redeem Israel, the nations may quake, with the quaking mountains, at his Presence. Let them be thrown into consternation and amazement at this new revelation of the Divine love and power; but let them also be drawn by it to fear and serve the God who alone doeth wonders. For the nations are to quake, as Moses exceedingly feared and quaked, when "*Thou doest terrible things beyond our hope.*" And "terrible things" is a standing form, a technical phrase in the Old Testament, for the signs and

wonders which accompanied the Exodus.¹ What the Prophet means is, therefore, that the new exodus, the exodus from Babylon, is to be preceded and attended by wonders similar to those, and even greater than those, which signalized the exodus from Egypt, wonders which are to surpass all the hopes bred by the memory of that great deliverance. Of these wonders *the nations*, as well as the Jews, are to be amazed yet interested spectators: for they are to be to *them*, as well as to the Jews, a revelation of the Name of God, which both Jews and Gentiles have forgotten or misapprehended.

If we ask, What is to be the effect, or what effect the Prophet expects and desires this new revelation to produce on the nations? the answer is supplied in Verses 4 and 5, which also give us the ground on which the prophetic hope was based. That hope was based on the character of Jehovah as revealed in history. He, and He alone, had again and again appeared to succour and redeem those who put their trust in Him. Hence He might, and would, appear for them once more. And this truth, this conception of God, which had long been the consolation of Israel, was now to be conveyed to the Gentiles. The new advent of Jehovah, the new revelation of his Name—his character, his power and love—would teach them that He was the Friend and Saviour of *all* who trusted in Him. No other God had ever done wonders for those who waited on Him and for Him. No eye had seen, no ear had heard of such a God as this, a God who really and effectively interposed

¹ Deut. x. 21 ; 2 Sam. vii. 23 ; Psalm cvi. 22.

for the salvation of men. The divided and warring gods of the heathen Pantheon could not save and protect even their most devoted worshippers. Those whose cause one god espoused were opposed by his rivals. And a dark incomprehensible Fate sat high above them all, compelling them to execute its inscrutable decrees. And how could sinful gods save men from the sins which were the cause and spring of all their miseries? But Jehovah always has appeared, argues the Prophet, to redeem us when we were melting away in the hands of our iniquities, appeared, first, to punish us for our sins, that we might repent of our sins and renounce them; and then appeared, on our repentance, to deliver us from the miseries which our sins had bred. And hence He will, He must, appear once more. It is his nature, his habit, thus to interpose; and He cannot be untrue to Himself. When He does interpose *the nations* will learn what He is like—how holy in his abhorrence of evil, how good and merciful in redeeming those who repent them of the evil they have done. In saving us, He will make known his Name even to our adversaries, and teach even them to hope for his salvation.

The truth which this new revelation will convey to both Jews and Gentiles is still further defined in the words: "*Thou meetest him who joyfully worketh righteousness, who remembereth Thee, walking in thy ways.*" For here the Prophet rises out of all national limitations of thought, and affirms a general principle of the Divine Providence, a principle true of all men in all ages of time, a principle as true of us and for us as it was for

the nations of the ancient world. *They* did not know, they were about to be taught, that God interposes on behalf of those who wait on Him. And there are those among us who do not know it, who will not believe it, who affirm that God never has and never can interpose for the instruction and salvation of men—affirm it in the teeth of the whole Bible story, in the teeth *i.e.*, of all the men who have had the profoundest experience of God's power to teach and save, and are therefore the best judges of what He has done and can do. Hence we also need to be assured, as we are assured here, that it is the nature and habit of God to *meet* those who in every nation, and under whatever strain of evil and miserable conditions, cheerfully work righteousness, so to meet and encounter them as to leave no doubt of a Divine visitation and help. And as I would rather trust Huxley or Tyndall than Isaiah on a question of physical science, so I would rather trust him than them on a question of spiritual insight and experience. For he was a prophet; and the Prophets were men who had devoted themselves to a study of the ways of God with men; they were men who spent their lives in telling and foretelling what the issues of human conduct must be under the rule and providence of God. They had seen their predictions verified again and again. And among the principles which had thus been verified for them was this: that God never fails to appear for those who work righteousness cheerfully, and who go on doing that which is right with steadfast courage when times are hard and dark and menacing. For the truth

of this principle they had, besides their own experience, that of all their predecessors: while, to us, it comes ratified, not only by our own experience and by the inbred and deepest instincts of our natures, but by the whole subsequent history of man. We have seen and know for ourselves that Righteousness does make men strong, and that in two ways: in the inward and immediate reward of the bettered character and higher hopes it brings with it; and in the final outward response of God to our trust in Him and in his righteous will, in the happier and larger conditions into which at last Righteousness raises all who love and pursue it.

The full and final salvation of the righteous, their salvation into happier outward conditions, may be delayed—delayed even until they have well-nigh ceased to expect it. It may take them by surprise when it comes. The Prophet implies that it will take them by surprise: for when he says to God, “Thou *meetest* him who joyfully worketh righteousness,” the verb he uses really means, “Thou *strikest up against* him,” as if God’s salvation came upon him suddenly and with a shock, taking away his breath, filling him with amazement. But however long it may be delayed, however suddenly it may surprise them, it will come, at last, to all who rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him.

It is instructive to note the delicate strokes which the Prophet adds to his tiny sketch of the righteous man whom, sooner or later, God redeems from all evil. (1) In a single word he adds much to our conception of him. The righteous man whom he has in his eye is

cheerfully righteous; he works righteousness *joyfully*. And if simple righteousness makes a man strong, how much more does the righteousness which carries itself brightly under all the changes, temptations, and miseries of time? (2) How much support, too, does even the righteous man gain from the conviction that the ways in which he walks are *God's ways* rather than his own, that it is God who has marked them out for him, God who has called him into them, and that therefore he may confidently expect succour and blessing from God so long as he continues in them? And (3) this good man, this cheerful lover and doer of righteousness, *remembers* God as he walks in God's ways, cherishes a constant sense of his presence, a constant trust in his goodness, a constant expectation of his support and benediction: this godliness being the secret both of his cheerfulness and of his steadfast adherence to ways that are right and good. Take the whole description, "Thou meetest him who joyfully worketh righteousness, who remembereth Thee, walking in thy ways"—and cannot we set our seal to it that it is true? Is it not in very deed a principle of the œconomy under which we and all men live? Was any man ever yet cheerfully good and steadfastly devout without being the better for it, the happier, the richer in all that makes life worth living?

Looking back over the entire passage, we may sum up by saying, that in the opening invocation of his Prayer, the Prophet cries out for a new revelation of the character and will of God as marked and wonderful as that of Sinai, or even more marked and wonderful,

the effect of which shall be to make Him known, not as the Hope and Saviour of Israel alone, but of all in every nation who love and pursue righteousness, and who remember Him as they walk in ways that are good.¹

II. THE CONFESSION (Verses 5-7). In the middle of Verse 5 the invocation of a Divine Advent modulates into a sorrowful and pathetic confession of sin. They had just acknowledged that it was the nature and habit of God to wait, to surprise, to strike up against him that worketh righteousness cheerfully ; to appear for his deliverance when, plunged in darkness, he had well-nigh lost hope of deliverance, though he still held fast to his love of that which was right and good, plodding cheerfully on his way although no bright prospect drew him on. But no such surprise, no such deliverance, had been vouchsafed to *them*. And hence they inferred, not that God had changed his habit, not that He was untrue to Himself, but that they had not wrought righteousness cheerfully, had not wrought it at all, that they had neither remembered Him nor walked in his ways. "Instead of surprising us with a meeting, a deliverance, beyond our hopes," they say, "or even such a revelation of love and pity as we had hoped for, *Thou art angry with us*. We must have deserved thine anger then. No conclusion is possible but that *we have sinned*: for

¹ I need hardly say that this Exposition is too long for a single discourse. When I used it I made two of it, breaking off the first at this point with an extemporized conclusion, and commencing the second at the next paragraph with an extemporized introduction.

had we continued in thy ways, we had been saved: the common lot of the righteous would have befallen us, and we should ere now have been joyfully surprised with the deliverance of him who worketh righteousness joyfully. Troubles might still have fallen on us, troubles as strange and manifold as any we have experienced; thy love is no guarantee against that: but nevertheless we should have been saved—saved *by* our troubles, or saved *out of* our troubles.”

Even in the Bible itself it would be hard to find a verse more crowded than this with fine generalizations, true for all time. There are no less than three of them, and we shall do well to lay them all up in our memories and hearts. For we, too, have every reason to believe (1) that God surprises the good man who cheerfully encounters evil times with a deliverance beyond his hopes: (2) that if we are not delivered by or from our troubles, it is because we have not retained a cheerful faith in righteousness: and (3) that if we return to and continue in his ways, we *shall* be saved, that our deliverance from sin and its attendant miseries is drawing nigh and will soon be here.

In Verse 6 the induction, “We *must* have sinned or we should have been saved,” is followed by the confession, “We *have* sinned.” And this pathetic confession of sin is couched in figures which, as we consider them, yield us still other fine generalizations that we shall do well to add to our store.

But, before we come to them, we must observe that the Confession is marked throughout by a sympathy which

forbids the righteous—for it is the faithful Remnant, not the unfaithful many, who are speaking—to dissociate themselves from their sinful neighbours, by a generous charity which compels them to feel their neighbours' sins as a stain on their own purity, and to acknowledge them as their own. Just as Messiah bore the sins of the many, just as He assumed and carried the iniquity of us all, so these good men confess, "*We have sinned,*" though they themselves were righteous in the sight of God. In the Original this association of the good with the guilty, this resolute and generous adoption of the national iniquity by the righteous, is much more marked and emphatic than in our translation. To bring it out we should have to render the phrases which follow thus: "*We, all of us, became as one unclean ;*" "*We, all of us, faded like the leaves ;*" "*We, all of us, are the work of thy hands ;*" "*We, all of us, are thy people.*"

And when we begin to look into these and the like phrases, there is much in them besides this generous sympathy, this vicarious assumption of guilt, to touch our imaginations and our hearts. The figures employed in them are wonderfully expressive and moving ; they tell a tale which comes home to every sensitive conscience and appeals to every generous spirit. "*We all became as one unclean,*" for instance, means, as the word rendered "*unclean*" indicates, "*We all became like the leper who has to cry 'tâmē, tâmē' (unclean, unclean !)* at every step, that men may get out of his way and not be contaminated by his touch." And how could the sense of a cleaving and well-nigh ineradicable guilt,

and of the loneliness and misery, the loathsomeness and shame, it breeds, be more intensely and pathetically rendered? Who can overhear these good and faithful men crying out, under the burden of sins not their own, that they have become as lepers in the sight of God and man, and not be moved?

The second figure, "*And all our righteous deeds became as a garment soiled with blood,*" is no less expressive of a cleaving and loathsome impurity to those who know what suggestions the Hebrew carries with it. Modern manners do not permit me even to hint at them; and indeed, when we remember how any contact with human blood tainted men, according to the Hebrew law, with an uncleanness which rendered them unapproachable by their fellows and incapable of any sacred function, the figure is already sufficiently strong, though it can hardly affect us like the picture of the shunned and solitary leper, with his monotonous and mournful cry.

The third figure is strikingly beautiful and complete, and sums up the whole tragedy of life in a single sentence; for, here, the idea of the retributions which wait on sin is not implied simply, as in the case of the leper, but adequately and fully expressed. The faithful Remnant confess, "*We, all of us, faded like the leaves, and our iniquities, like a storm, have carried us away.*" We have become like faded leaves; *i.e.*, our sins have robbed us of all vital strength and energy; decay has set in, and we hang trembling on the stem of David, or have fallen to the ground and been trodden under foot. And, like faded or fallen leaves, easily

swept down or swept away by every wind, we have been carried away by the storm of retribution which our iniquities have provoked. Wilfully fading, fading in the fair summer of our days at Jerusalem, we have been swept by the wind of thy wrath into this Babylonian dungeon.

Even this figure, however, noble and exhaustive as it seems, does not exhaust the penitential emotion of their breast. And, in Verse 7, it first breaks out into plain words, and then once more rises, with the rising swell of passion, into the metaphors in which strong and impassioned emotion naturally expresses itself. "Steeped in sinful lethargy," they confess, "*we, no one of us, called on thy Name, i.e., we, as a nation, lost all faith, all trust, in thy character, thy kind pure Will; and no one of us stirred up himself to take hold on Thee, i.e., we did not rouse ourselves to that deep inward strife with Thee in which our father Jacob refused to let Thee go until Thou hadst blessed him. There was no resolute and sustained endeavour to shake off our iniquities, and to reknit the broken bonds of communion with Thee. And, therefore, by a natural and inevitable retribution, we could not see Thee even when we did look for Thee: Thou didst hide thy face from us; and, hiding thy face, didst leave us to melt away in the hand of our iniquities.*"

Both the figures here employed speak to our experience; for is it not true that when men hide themselves from God among their sins, it always seems to them that God has hidden his face from them? Is it

not also true, and a truth depicted here with an appalling force, that when men persist in sin they perish in and by their sins, that God leaves them in the hot emasculating grasp of their iniquities? There is truth here, then, as well as poetry—the noblest poetry being always, indeed, the highest truth. The great mass of the Jews *did* melt away in the hand of their iniquities, preferring the treasures of Babylon to the wealth of peace with God, and choosing rather to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season than to suffer affliction with his people. They renounced their covenant with Him, their part and lot in Israel. Most of them refused to return to Jerusalem even when return became possible, even when it became an imperative duty, and melted away, lost to name and fame and use, in the land of their captivity. And which of us has not found his pleasant vices turned into a scourge? which of us has not seen a friend weakened, reduced to a wasting and terrible bondage from which at last he did not care to escape, and finally slain before his time, by some sinful habit, some lust of the flesh or of the fleshly mind? There is not one of us, I suppose, to whom this pain is unknown, not one who has not seen men literally “melt away” in the hand of their iniquities, losing first their freedom, and then their manhood, and then their life.

III. THE SUPPLICATION (Verses 8–12). In the eighth verse this graphic, pathetic, and most instructive confession of sin passes into a prayer for forgiveness and salvation: “*But, now, O Lord, Thou art our Father; we are the clay and Thou our Maker; we, all of us, are*

the work of thy hands." The supplication is based, you observe, simply on the Divine Character, on the relation in which God stands to them, and not on any desert of which they are conscious in themselves. Nay, they do but glance at his fatherly relation to them ; and then, as if conscious that men so sinful and unclean can hardly claim to be regarded as his children, they fall back on a more common and remote relation. God is at least their Maker, as He is the Maker of all things. On *this* relation they dwell, reminding Him that they are but as clay which He has chosen to place upon his wheel and mould into a vessel of honour. The argument at which they hint is simple enough, but wonderfully cogent. "Thou art our Father, Thou our Maker. But no Potter would be so wasteful as to cast away into irretrievable destruction the vessel on which he had lavished all the treasures of his skill. Wilt *Thou* ? No Father would be so unkind as to cast off his children, however sinful or unworthy, when they came back to him confessing their sin and crying for pity. Wilt *Thou* ?"

But there is more than argument in this opening clause of the Supplication. There is a most hopeful and auspicious implication in it. For they are reminding *themselves* as well as God that He is their Maker and their Father. What they really mean and imply is : "We have forgotten Thee, and resisted thy grace as our Father, thy purpose as our Maker ; but we will do so no more. We surrender ourselves to be moulded by the Wisdom and the Love against which we have so long rebelled."

And therefore they continue in Verse 9, "We beseech Thee *be not angry with us to the uttermost*, so as to destroy us, *neither remember our iniquity for ever*. *Cast but a glance on us, and see, are we not, all of us, thy people?* Thou hast chosen us for Thyself, chosen us therefore, not for our own sake alone, but for the blessing which Thou hast stored up in us for the world at large. How shall 'the nations' (Verse 2) know thy Name, and tremble at thy presence, if we are cast away and consumed in thy wrath; if Thou dost not do glorious things for those who wait on Thee, things as far beyond our hopes as our deserts?"

The prayer is a most hopeful and suggestive one; for to the penitent confession of sin it adds a resolute purpose of amendment: and forgiveness is never denied to those who mend their ways as well as confess their faults. Moreover, with the desire for a personal salvation it blends an aspiration for the salvation of "the nations," *i.e.*, of the world; and when men are seeking, not their own salvation only, but the salvation of their neighbours, their salvation has in very deed already begun.

Verses 10 and 11 supply another ground for supplication. As they had already based their appeal for pity and help on the character and the call of God, so now they weave a new argument for his pity and help out of their very misery and helplessness. "*All the holy places*," they plead, "as well as the hill of Zion and the city of Jerusalem, in which Thou hast set thy name or revealed thy presence, *have been laid waste*, turned into

a wilderness, into mere pasture land for sheep and goats. Above all, our holy and our beautiful house, the temple in which our fathers saw and praised Thee, has been burned with fire. Hallowed by the revelations of thy glory, by centuries of worship which ceased not day nor night, by the memories of all our wisest and best, by the love and admiration of generation after generation, it lies a blackened ruin in the sun: *and all in which we took delight*—the feasts, the songs, the sacrifices, the presence of the King, the national trophies and heir-looms, the golden censer, the golden candlestick, the ark of the covenant, the pot that held the manna, Aaron's budding rod, the tables of the Covenant, the Mercy-seat and the cherubim of glory which overshadowed it—we have lost them all. We have deserved to lose them. But, oh, how much have we lost! how terribly have our sins been punished and avenged!"

"Wilt Thou, despite all this, refrain Thyself, O Lord? Wilt Thou keep silence, and leave us to suffer to the uttermost? How, then, shall thy purpose for us, and for the world, be carried out? How shall thy Name be made known to the nations and thy will disclosed?"

The Prayer ends with a sob, then; and the sob might sound like a wail of despair but for a single word. But in the word, "*Wilt Thou refrain Thyself, O Lord?*" there is an historical allusion which is full of hope. It implies that as He listens to the Supplicants sobbing out their confessions and importunities at his feet, Jehovah will no more be able to "refrain" Himself than Joseph was when his guilty brethren fell at his feet with strong cry-

ings and tears. He *must* forgive them. He must make Himself known to them, must use his power on their behalf. And so the Prayer rounds back on itself, and in its last sentence there is a latent promise that the invocation with which it opens will evoke a speedy and gracious response. God *will* rend the heavens and come down, to make known his Name among the nations, and to do gloriously for those who have waited for Him.

It is a model Prayer, and we may learn from it how we should approach the Majesty on high—with what penitent confessions of sin, with what resolute purposes of amendment, with what generous charity for our neighbours, with what patient trust and cheerful hope in the Divine Goodness and Compassion. But that which is most notable and precious in the Chapter is, I think, the gems of thought and expression, the series of noble generalizations to which I have often had to refer. For in these there are great truths for all men, in all conditions, through all the changes of time. That it is the nature and habit of God to surprise with his salvation those who cheerfully work righteousness, even when the clouds are most thick and menacing, and who joyfully remember Him as they walk in his ways ; that under the wasting power of sin we fade like a leaf, and may only too easily be carried away by the first wind of retribution that blows ; that, if we persist in our sins, we shall surely melt away in the hand of our iniquities ; that, if we repent of and renounce our sins, God will not be able to “refrain” Himself, but will be constrained to make Himself known to us in all the

glory and wonder of a love that can never change and never die: these and the like are truths of a sovereign virtue, of a permanent and immeasurable value. And they are here thrown into forms so memorable and exquisite that, when once we have grasped them, they can hardly fail to recur to us in every time of need, and teach us both where to look for guidance, help, salvation, and how to ask for the salvation we crave.

There is still one question to which we must find a reply if our exposition is to be complete.

When was this Prayer answered? No doubt it was answered in part when, led by the hand of God, the captive Jews went up from their exile in Babylon, and re-entered the land of their fathers. In the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus and his Persians, in the enfranchisement of the Hebrew captives who had pined under the cruel Chaldean yoke, in their restoration to the Holy Land, and their establishment in it despite all the efforts and assaults of their foes, there was a manifestation of the power and grace of God which produced a profound impression on the nations of the East; and this manifestation was accompanied by signs and wonders as marvellous as any which the Hebrew fathers had seen when they were led out of Egypt by the hands of Moses and Aaron.

This, doubtless, was the answer to his Prayer which the Prophet had in view. But St. Paul has taught us to look for another and a larger answer to it. Just as the Prophet connected the exodus from Babylon with the exodus from Egypt, so the Apostle connected the

redemption of the Jews from their Babylonian captivity with the redemption of the whole world from a captivity still more cruel and degrading. The Prophet affirmed that ear had never heard, nor eye seen, any God but Jehovah who would do terrible and glorious things for them that waited on Him. And St. Paul takes the words out of his mouth, and affirms that the wonderful and glorious things which eye had not seen, nor ear heard, nor heart conceived, but which God had prepared for them that love Him, are the things, the grace and truth, which came to all the world by Christ (1 Cor. ii. 9, 10). The Gospel of Christ is the true revelation of the name and character of God. It was *He* who wrought the true and great redemption which fulfilled and transcended all the prævisions and hopes of men. It is in Christ that God most truly meets every man who works righteousness cheerfully, and who remembers Him while walking in his ways.

So that it is in *our* experience, after all, that this sublime Prayer is really answered. For us in very deed the heavens have been rent, the light has broken through the clouds, the whole tender meaning of the Divine Name has been disclosed. And, therefore, it is we who of all men should trust in God, and in the salvation of God, even when times are darkest, and the air is thick with threatening signs of change. Let us, then, at all times stay our hearts on Him.

XII.

FORGIVENESS NOT IMPUNITY.

“And Nathan said unto David, The Lord hath put away thy sin ; thou shalt not die. Howbeit, the child that is born unto thee shall surely die.”—2 SAMUEL xii. 13, 14.

THERE are not many Chapters in the Old Testament which are more familiar to us than this. We have all read it again and again, and have been moved by it to wonder and awe and pity. How marvellous, for instance, and how admonitory is the lordly unconsciousness with which David listens to the story of his own crime, although it is but thinly veiled in Nathan’s parable of the poor man’s “little ewe lamb” ! How hotly his indignation flames up against the rich neighbour who “spared to take of his own flock,” but took without compunction the poor man’s only lamb, which “lay in his bosom and was as a daughter unto him,” and dressed it for the traveller that was come to him ! How strange and thrilling—and to us who are in the secret, and see behind the screen, how tragic—is the outburst of his indignant anger, “As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this shall surely die !” What, indeed, can be

more terrible than to hear the sinner unconsciously condemn his own sin, and pass sentence on himself? What more strange than that a conscience, ordinarily so quick and sensitive as that of David, should be so insensible to its own burden and stain—a burden so heavy, a stain so deep? It is hardly possible to read the story and miss the solemn warning, that we too, even those of us in whom conscience is commonly the most keen to mark and the most swift to avenge, may carry about with us a secret guilt which we have not so much as recognized, much less renounced. And as we consider that warning, which of us does not cry, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts: see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting”?

Nor is the sentence which the Prophet passes on David less pathetic, or less suggestive, than that which David passes on himself. Nathan’s “Thou art the man!” turns the king’s indignation into contrition. It quickens in him a profound sense of the debasement and pollution into which he has fallen, and a prophetic fear of judgment. He casts himself on the ground, and fasts seven days and seven nights—afflicting the flesh through which evil has reached him. He exhausts himself, as we learn from Psalm li., in penitential confessions. He looks back, and all his life, noble as for the most part it seems to us, is, to him, polluted with dark taints of iniquity. He bewails his evil nature, and crowning sin, with tears of anguish. He beseeches God to forgive and spare him, and to save his sick boy from death.

And yet the boy dies! God has listened to his prayer, has put away his sin. David *knows* that he is forgiven. But his prayer is not answered; or, rather, it *is* answered, but not according to his asking. The child dies. The Divine Will overrides the human will. And David comes before God with the sacrifices of a broken heart and a contrite spirit, consciously submitting his will to the Will of God. In token of his submission he puts off the ordinary shows of mourning; he anoints himself, he eats bread, he puts on royal apparel, and worships in the house of the Lord.

Thus, observe, the circle comes full home. David's will had diverged from the will of God, when he went after his sin. It had flown off into unknown depths of darkness. *Now* it is drawn back to its true centre and rest. It is shewn to be once more in accord with the Divine Will by an obedience stronger than love or death.

Here, then, we have a striking illustration of two practical lessons of immense worth: (1) that forbearance, forgiveness even, does not mean impunity; and (2) that punishment is intended to induce repentance.

I. *Forgiveness does not mean Impunity.* A man may be pardoned, and nevertheless he may be punished. His sin may be put away from him, and yet its painful issues and results may flow in upon him as if his sin were unpardoned. God forgave David; yet God bereaved David. God announced his forgiveness, and yet in the same breath foretold his punishment: "Thy sin is put away; nevertheless, the child that is born unto thee shall surely die." And this is no exceptional, no extra-

ordinary, case. It is simply a notable illustration of a general law. In all ages the sins of penitent men are forgiven them; and in all ages penitent men have to endure the punitive results of the very sins that have been forgiven. Whatsoever they sow, that they reap, however bitterly they may repent having mingled tares with the wheat. Abraham sinned, in his eagerness to secure "the child of the promise," by taking Hagar to wife. His sin was forgiven him. But none the less he was troubled with strife and discord in his tent: *i.e.*, the natural result of his deed came upon him. In his eagerness to secure the promised birthright, Jacob deceived his father, defrauded his brother. God forgave him his sin, nay, met him at Bethel to assure him of forgiveness, to ratify the promise, to foretell the wide inheritance of good on which he should enter. Yet he had to eat the bitter fruit of his sin through long years of labour and sorrow and fear. God chastened him again and again till, at Peniel, the subtle spirit of deceit was cast out of him. Yet, *even after that*—after the sin was pardoned, after the pardon was published, after the evil heart was replaced by a clean heart and a right spirit—even then, and to the very last, Jacob was deceived by his children, defrauded by his kinsmen and neighbours, was, in short, paid back in his own coin. Peter sinned, in that he denied his Master with oaths and curses. His sin was forgiven. It was the tender forgiving look of Christ which broke his heart when he went out and wept bitterly. Yet Peter had to go softly many days; to brook the pain of the thrice-repeated

reproach, "Lovest thou me?" to find his sin recoiling upon him years afterward when he played the "hypocrite" at Antioch and St. Paul had to withstand him to his face.

And it is thus with us also, incredible as it may seem to the young and inconsiderate. We cannot too early or too completely clear our minds of the superstition, that in the moral world we may touch pitch and not be defiled, or thrust our hand into the fire and not be burned. The law which binds together cause and effect holds in the ethical world as inexorably as in any other. When we sin, we may find forgiveness with God. We know that He will and does forgive us if we confess and renounce our sin. But forgiveness does not carry impunity with it. The natural and logical consequences of our sin are not severed from it because we are sorry and God is merciful. Ezekiel simply states a law of the Divine Government in its extreme form when he says: "When the righteous man turneth away from his righteousness and committeth iniquity, all the righteousness which he hath done shall not be mentioned; in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die."

Do we not know it and see it? The sins of the righteous *are* forgiven them by the Love which made an end of sin. Nevertheless, their falsehoods bring on them the common penalty of distrust, and their dishonesties the common penalty of loss of character, and their intemperance the common penalty of physical disease and public reprobation. From their self-indulgent and

passionate tempers in the home there spring the same discord, confusion, and fear as in the households of the ungodly; from their meanness and injustice, the same aversion and jealousy and contempt. God has forgiven us innumerable transgressions; yet they have each one of them left its mark upon us; we can trace their weakening and depraving effects upon our thoughts, our desires, our conduct to this day. We are not what we might and should have been but for them. We have done less good, more harm, than we might have done. We are more ready to suspect evil in others than we should have been, and more liable to fall before certain forms of temptation. God has forgiven our sins; and yet here they all are, in their effects and results, darkening your life and mine: in body and in soul we may still trace the defacing footprints of forgiven trespasses. And, therefore, we can well understand the word which came to David: "Thy sin is put away; . . . nevertheless, the child shall die."

Now this law often seems stern and cruel to us. We are tempted to ask: "He who has put away our guilt, might He not also have freed us from its effects? Why does He not listen to our sorrowful and impassioned cries? Why does He compel us to eat the bitter fruit of our sins long after we loathe the evil root from which they sprang?"

II. And, therefore, we need to learn our second lesson—*the Meaning and Mercy of Punishment*; we need to mark how punishment breeds in us a repentance that worketh life.

One very obvious reason why God does not detach their natural results from our sins even when He forgives our sins is, that to do so would necessitate an incessant display of miraculous power before which all law and certainty would be swept away, and our very conceptions of right and wrong would be confused. God has so made the world and so ordered human life that every seed brings forth fruit after its kind, every action issues in a corresponding result. This is the constant invariable law. Holding fast by this law, we know what to expect, we can foresee what fruit our actions will bring forth. But were God for ever to violate the law by lifting every penitent beyond the reach of the painful results whose natural causes he had set in motion, no man would any longer know what to expect, an element of bewildering uncertainty would enter into every lot. Instead of that noble being, with large discourse of reason, looking before and after ; instead of being able to calculate the results of action and to rely on the certainties of law, man would sink into the slave of an incalculable and unintelligible Caprice ; pleasure and pain would be exalted over right and wrong, the sacredness of duty would be impaired, the very pillars of the universe would be shaken and removed out of their place.

Still, though this familiar argument may prove a sufficient answer to reason, it has no balm for a sore and wounded heart. To reach *that*, we must consider the moral effects of punishment on the individual soul. And here David's experience will help us much.

(1) For it teaches us how *Punishment deepens both our sense of sin and our hatred of it*. Before his punishment David, as we have seen, was not conscious of his transgression, or was not alive to its enormity, though we should have thought murder and adultery sins quite big enough to have been seen, even by an unassisted eye. He was blind to the personal application of Nathan's parable until the Prophet turned upon him with "*Thou art the man. Thou hast killed Uriah with the sword of Ammon, and hast taken his wife.*" But then, when the Prophet has spoken out, how deep is his shame, how keen and piercing the anguish of his heart! He stands self-revealed, self-condemned. He does not throw the blame on opportunity, or the strength of the temptation. He does not plead a passionate nature, or the license and exposure of kings. He is not even angry with the Prophet who has roused his slumbering conscience. He makes no attempt to shift the burden from himself, or to palliate his guilt. He sees the sin as *his*, his own, and not another's, sees it in all its heinousness and deformity. He cries, "Blot out *my* transgression; Wash me from my iniquity, cleanse me from my sin." So far from extenuating, he exaggerates his offence. "He lays on himself the blame of a tainted nature," instead of owning a single crime. "*Shapen in iniquity!*" he cries, "*conceived in sin!*" Nothing good in me from the moment of birth until now!

And this deep sense of personal guilt is a common and wholesome result of punishment. Strange as it may sound, it is yet true that we find it hard to believe

that the very sins we commit and regret are *our own*.¹ We lay the blame of them on circumstances, on sinister conspiracies of opportunity and desire, on the evil example of our neighbours, on the force of social customs, on hereditary tendencies and defects, on Adam and original sin, on the devil and his angels: in short, we blame any one or anything in order to acquit ourselves of our personal responsibility, or to excuse and palliate our guilt. But when the punishment of our sin overtakes us, when disease rebukes our sins against the body, or loss of character, property, freedom rebukes our sins against social law, when spiritual fears, infirmities, despairs rebuke the sins by which we have wronged our souls, then, in our grief and abasement, we trace the punishment to its true cause, and find it in our own evil hearts. Conscience shakes itself free from its drugged and drowsy slumbers, and cries, "It is *your* transgression; it is *your* sin." We no longer think, or affect to think, that the guilt lies with this tempter or that. They may each have their own burden to bear. But also we have ours. And ours is *our own*, solitary, unshared, incommunicable. And thus, day after day, as the old wounds re-open, and new sorrows spring from our old sins, we acknowledge our transgression, our sin is ever before us; we recognize the evil that is in us, and hate it with a more perfect hatred.

(2) *Punishment deepens self-distrust and reliance upon God.* When he acknowledged his sin to be his own

¹ See Robertson's Notes on Psalm li. in *Sermons*, vol. ii. pp. 84 ff.

David, who but now was so bold against evil, and so hot in his indignation against the wicked rich man in whom he recognized no likeness to himself, casts himself in utter self-abasement before God. So far from having any right to judge or rule others, he finds that he has misjudged, that he cannot rule, himself. Not only has he been wrong in this deed or that; he *is* wrong, wrong to the inmost heart. He can find nothing in himself which does not need to be cleansed and renewed, nothing on which he can rely. Hence he cries, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." He does not venture to offer any sacrifice to God except as God gives him *His* sacrifice—a broken spirit; not till God open his mouth can he shew forth praise. Only as he is upheld by God's free Spirit can he, who but now was judging transgressors, teach them God's way. In brief, now that he suffers the due reward of his deeds, he utterly distrusts himself; he can think no good thought, do no good act, offer no acceptable worship, save as God inspires and sustains him.

And is it not thus with us? We dread the punishment we have provoked. We cry, "Let not the doom we fear fall upon us, and we will never so offend again." But when God answers that prayer, how often does it happen that, after a while, trusting in ourselves that we can never be so wicked again, or made bold by impunity, we repeat that very sin, and once more provoke the Divine judgment! But when the punishment comes, pointing to the hidden evil which has brought it, and

compelling us to brood over it, we often conclude ourselves altogether evil and unclean. There is no more health in us. We can no longer trust ourselves. And so, drawn by our very straits and necessities, attracted and won by the very stroke which seemed to repel us, we come to God for a clean heart and a right spirit: we put our trust in Him, the God of our salvation.

(3) Lastly, *Punishment puts our repentance*, our surrender to the will of God, *to the proof*. David was no craven. It was not simply, nor mainly, the fear of judgment which led him to exhaust himself in confessions of guilt. It was, rather, the shame and agony of finding himself out, of discovering the unsuspected evil of his own heart, of being alienated from the God whom he sincerely loved. No doubt he was in bitterness lest the child should die, and besought that it might live. But not even his child, not even this innocent and unconscious victim of his guilt, was foremost in his thoughts. It is not so much as mentioned in the Psalm in which David poured out his soul before God. What touched him most nearly was the awful variance and estrangement which had crept in between his will and the will of God. It was *this* which he mourned in his prayer; it was this which he besought God to remove with strong cryings and tears. And, hence, when the child dies, David bows to the will of God. He will no longer fast and weep. Whatever that Will appoints, he will accept. Thus his penitence, his submission to the will of God, his return to obedience to the Divine law, is put to a decisive test, and surmounts it.

It is thus, once more, that God deals with us. We discover and confess our sin. God forgives our sin; we know and feel that He forgives it. But, none the less, the natural punishment of our sin falls upon us. And now, if our repentance be sincere, if it is the evil and the alienation of our hearts that we really hate, and not the painful issues of our evil conduct, we shall take our punishment, not as the angry blows and rebukes of an offended God, but as the corrections of a loving Father who, because He desires nothing so much as our well-being, puts our penitence and our recovered obedience to a decisive test. We shall say, "This law which binds sorrow to sin is a Divine law. It expresses our Father's good-will toward us, his resolve to make us good at all costs." Let us accept it cheerfully, although it bring us pain, nay, *because* it will chasten and crucify the passions by which we have been betrayed. For thus we shall shew and prove that our will has in very deed become one with his, and returned to its rest in Him. Thus, too, we shall rise, on stepping-stones of our dead selves, to higher better things.

XIII.

DIVES AND LAZARUS.

“And in all these things there is a great gulf fixed between us and you.”—LUKE xvi. 26.

FROM the first this parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus has profoundly impressed the imagination of the Church. It has been expounded by all the great fathers, preachers, divines. And yet it is as difficult as ever to say what its special moral or intention is, what doctrine it was designed to illustrate. It can hardly have been intended for a revelation of the life to come, or surely our Lord would have spoken to us more plainly, and not have left us to gather his meaning from broken hints of dubious interpretation. Those who, in the very spirit of Dives himself, insist on finding in it a disclosure of the external conditions and incidents of the life beyond the grave, who *will* build on this unsure foundation their theories of what we call the future state, only succeed in reducing both themselves and the Parable to hopeless confusion. For if, for example, we are to take the flame in which Dives was tormented as a literal flame, and to infer that at their death wicked men pass into a lake of fire and brimstone in which they are for ever consumed,

we must also take Abraham's bosom literally, and the great gulf, and the conversation between father Abraham and his hapless son; in which case we are bound to conceive of heaven as a great feast of which Abraham is the host, and in which Lazarus occupies the place of honour. We are also bound to believe that heaven and hell, though separated from each other by an impassable chasm, are nevertheless so close together that the inhabitants of the one may hold converse with the denizens of the other; that the torments of the lost are aggravated by the perfect bliss which they behold but can never hope to share, while the spirits of the saved can abide in an unbroken blessedness as they gaze down on the torments of the pit and listen to its shrieks of horror and despair. We must believe that, though a man in hell can still care and plead for his lost brethren on earth, a man in heaven can be quite indifferent to the fate of *his* lost brethren in hell: nay, we must believe that, though there are some in heaven who "*would*" pass across the great gulf if they could, the very God of heaven will not suffer them to do it, and has lost all pity for the children whom He once loved so well.

All this being simply incredible—as opposed to the teaching of Scripture as to the dictates of reason and conscience—we are compelled to conclude that in this Parable our Lord adopted the current language of his day about the world invisible, and did not intend that we should infer dogmas from it by process of logic. Lazarus wearing purple and fine linen in heaven, and faring

sumptuously every day at Abraham's table, is not necessarily one whit better, or one whit better off, than Dives was on earth ; nay, he is worse and worse off if he will not carry a drop of water to the parched tongue of the man who at least did not grudge him the crumbs which fell from his table.

What, then, *is* the moral of the Parable ? How does it bear on the life to come of which it says so much, although it says it in terms so ambiguous ?

If it is *a moral* we are seeking, if, *i.e.*, it is a truth which will purge and raise the tone of our moral life, and not a disclosure which will gratify our curiosity about the future, that moral is not far to seek. For just as the Parable teaches us that *this* life is not what it seems,¹ that heaven and hell lie behind its outward shows—the heaven of being good and the hell of being bad, so also it teaches us that the life to come is the continuation and the product of the life we now live in the flesh : and this is indeed a moral, a truth which bears directly on our present conduct and duty.

Put in the most general terms, its teaching and suggestion seem to be that, viewed from the Christian standpoint, every man's life here moves along a line which is the resultant of a vast complex of forces, forces which draw him now in this direction and now in that : not a straight line in any case, since no life is moved

¹ Dr. John Service, in the first discourse included in his *Salvation Here and Hereafter*, works out this thought so finely as to leave no room for other handling of it ; and therefore I simply mention it and pass by.

by a single force or runs undiverted to its end ; but a curve, influenced by many forces, the dominant sweep or direction of which is determined by its bias toward that which is inward, spiritual, good, or its bias toward that which is outward, temporal, evil. All these curving lines meet in the single point of death, but meet only to start afresh, and to start in the direction of the dominant impulse. And, hence, the lives which were separated by a moral gulf from each other here will still be separated from each other in the world to come ; only now—now that they are removed from a world of shows to a world of realities—it may well be that they will be found on opposite sides of the gulf to those which they occupied before ; those which were comforted here being tormented there, and those which were tormented here being comforted there. But who shall say that these flexible and curving lines of life, which have already met and passed through the single point of death, may not be produced until they meet in another point, and meantime be so modified in their course, by new attractions brought to bear upon them, as that, when they start again, they may take another and a happier direction ? The New Testament obscurely hints at such a point in the Judgment which, at a vast interval apparently, is to follow death, and thus affords us at least a hope that, in the end, all the lines of life may meet and rest in their proper centre—the love and service of God, since even the terrors of judgment may be then, as they are now, a disciplinary and redeeming energy.

This, as you know, I take to be the teaching, not of

this Parable alone, but of the whole New Testament concerning the future destiny of man. And in so far as the special moral of the Parable is concerned, viz., that the life to come is, as science and reason affirm it ought to be, the continuation and product of the present life, it stands on the most solid foundation. It is taught not in parables alone, nor in figurative forms of speech, but in a plain and express affirmation which runs through the whole Bible from end to end. For, whatever may seem doubtful to us, we cannot doubt that the Scriptures everywhere affirm that, in the life that follows this, every man is to receive the due reward of his deeds, of *all* his deeds, whether they have been good or bad. If any man were at the pains of collecting all the passages in which this plain affirmation is distinctly made, he would be amazed at the number of them, and at the variety of forms into which this simple assertion is thrown. And how could Holy Scripture more clearly teach us than by this iterated and reiterated affirmation, that all the deeds of this life are to be carried forward, in their results and effects, into the life to come, and to give that life its direction and form?

This, I say, is the great, abiding, all-pervading affirmation of the Bible on the life to come—teaching us all we really need for our guidance here. And as this affirmation meets the demands of reason and conscience, and is confirmed by the speculations or the intuitions of the sages and moralists of every age, it should govern all our interpretations, whether of discourse or parable, in which that life is set forth.

Mark, then, how it is illustrated and confirmed by the Parable before us, and by all the details of the Parable. Little as we are told of Dives, there is no difficulty in ascertaining the dominant bias of his life, the line along which it moved. We are not told that he was as bad as he was rich. He does not seem to have been what even those of us who judge our neighbours most severely would have called a bad man. Free from many of the commonest faults of the rich, he was proud of his descent from Abraham, and respectfully familiar with Moses and the Prophets. In the estimate of his own race and time, he was, in all probability, an eminently respectable and religious man; a little addicted to luxury perhaps, but not more so than became his opulence, and hospitably willing to share his luxury with others. None the less he was a man who looked and lived and dwelt in the mere outsides of things. Even in himself he valued that which was exterior to his true self, rather than that which was inward and essential—putting his body before his soul, pampering his senses rather than cultivating the faculties and affections of his spirit. He looked on human life, too, from the outside rather than from the inside, “living in mirth and splendour every day,” rather than in wisdom and righteousness and love; deeming it better to be rich than to be good and kind; finding “*his* good things,” *i.e.*, the chief good and end of life, in sensuous comfort and enjoyment, and his evil things in the poverty and sickness which would render that enjoyment impossible. Even Religion itself was for him mainly a thing of outward form and

show. He calls Abraham "*father* Abraham," indeed ; but it is evidently to his physical descent from Abraham that, like the Jews who said to the Baptist, "We have Abraham to our father," he attached importance, not to any inward ethical likeness to that great "father of the faithful." He is familiar with the writings of Moses and the Prophets, and may have been a learned and accomplished student in them, as were many of the Pharisees who listened to this Parable, but who, despite their Biblical lore, were "lovers of money" rather than lovers of God : but it was the letter of the Sacred Writings in which he was skilled and not the spirit, the outward form and not the inward life ; he had not been "persuaded" by them, nor led to repentance : for, as he himself assures us, he does not think that Moses and the Prophets are in the least likely to persuade his five brethren or induce them to repent. Obviously, he conceives of Religion as a series of external and arbitrary commandments to which, for the sake of an equally arbitrary and external reward, it may be worth a man's while to conform ; and not as the natural and inevitable outcome of man's inward nature and of his relation to God.

Of Lazarus we are told even less than of Dives, though we are not without some indications of his moral and religious character. For the very structure of the Parable implies a direct contrast between the two men, in inward character as well as in outward estate. And, therefore, we are bound to assume that the beggar stood at the moral antipodes of the rich man. We are bound

to conceive of him, *i.e.*, as caring more for the soul than the body, valuing human life as a scene of spiritual culture and growth rather than for the sensual comfort and enjoyment it might be made to yield, seeking to share the faith of faithful Abraham rather than trusting to his physical descent from the great founder of his race; and looking in the scriptures of Moses and the Prophets for that eternal life to which they contained a clue, instead of finding in them only a set of commandments and restrictions by which man's natural freedom was curtailed.

No two men could be separated from each other by a deeper gulf than this, or a gulf which it is more impossible for unaided man to cross. For, after all, *this* is the great line by which men are divided, and not that drawn by outward differences of creed, station, and possession. Everywhere—in all churches and outside them all—we find men who love God's law, so far as they know it, and are trying to live by it, because they hold that law to be an expression of his will designed to secure human welfare, and having no end but to secure that welfare. And everywhere—outside all the churches and in them all—there are men who resent or grudgingly submit to that law as to a needless and arbitrary fetter on human freedom, designed not for the good of man, but for the glory of an austere and selfish God. And before this inward and vital difference of character all other differences sink out of sight and are lost. Here lies the true gulf which separates man in this life and in all lives, in this world and in all worlds. And, hence, our

Parable affirms that in setting before them two such different and opposed ideals of human life, Dives and Lazarus were sinking the shaft by which they were divided both here and hereafter. "*In all these things there is a great gulf between us and you.*" It was not the poverty of the one man or the wealth of the other which stood between them, but the interior and radical divergence of character, aim, bent.

And this separation, commenced here, is continued, and cannot but be continued, hereafter. The main ply, the dominant bent, the ruling character, is not to be reversed in a moment, even though that moment be the moment of death. All the outward conditions of existence may, and must, be changed, but it would be a violation of the laws which govern human life were the inward character and bent to be *immediately* changed by the change in its conditions; though it would be an equal violation of those laws if this radical change in the environment did not *ultimately* work a corresponding change on character and habit and aim. The man who has centred his life in the outward pomps and shows of the world and of the Church, who has leaned with his whole weight and gathered up all his interests and aims on the gratification of the senses, on the sumptuous and luxurious enjoyment of his good things, on the form and letter of Religion, cannot but be impoverished when he is stripped of the body he has pampered, and the treasures he has amassed, and the forms in which he has worshipped, and enters into a world of spiritual and eternal realities to which he is a stranger.

And the man who has concentrated his chief aim and found his chief good in cultivating the life of the spirit, in living for wisdom, goodness, charity, cannot but be enriched when he passes into that world and finds himself happily at home in it. But, for a time at least, the two men will remain at bottom what they were, though the one will be pining for a good he has lost, and the other rejoicing in the good he has found.

It cannot be otherwise unless the laws of continuity and development are to be broken, and broken with an irrational shock of violence. And, certainly, our Parable holds out no prospect of such a shock. These two men, Dives and Lazarus, *do* remain what they were, so far as we can judge; their ruling characteristics *are* the same; their aims the same, their hopes and fears the same. Each receives the due recompense, or result, of his deeds.

Of Lazarus it is true we hear nothing save that his aim being reached, his chief good secured, he rises into a still and unspeakable blessedness, leaning on Abraham's bosom, *i.e.*, reclining next to father Abraham at the heavenly feast, occupying the place of honour both as faithful and much-loved son, and as most welcome guest—he who, before, had “desired to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table,” and, apparently, had often desired even that dog-like privilege in vain. In the Hadean world, as while he was in this present world, we have to infer nearly all we know of him from the contrast, evidently designed, between him and the rich man. But that Dives remains what he was, and

still holds by the views and ends which had grown into his very nature and transformed it into their own image, we can have no doubt. For take him at his highest point, and you find that he still thinks of Religion as an outward form and commandment ; not as commended to the soul by the soul's sense of need and of the relations in which it stands to its Maker and Lord, not, therefore, as proving and commending itself, but as something outside a man and needing to be proved by miracles, by apparitions. He is sure that his five brethren will never be persuaded by Moses and the Prophets, and their appeal to the moral sense ; but he is not without hope that, if one went to them from the dead, they would repent.

Mark, too, how the character of the man comes out in the words twice repeated, "*Send Lazarus.*" Send Lazarus, indeed ! Is, then, Lazarus still a poor beggar and slave, who has only to run on the rich man's errands and minister to his wants ? Obviously, the man has not yet realized the amazing difference between himself and the sick beggar whom he once pitied or despised. He speaks in his old tone of arrogant—of easy and therefore the more arrogant—superiority, although he is now in torment, and sees Lazarus afar off in Abraham's bosom.

It has often been said, indeed, that in his care for his five brethren, and for their salvation, the rich man takes a new tone, if not a new departure. And God forbid that I should altogether deny it. Yet it must be remembered that such a change of tone as this is but such a development of character as we should anticipate in a

man who had found the world of sense, in which he had lived, fall away from him, to usher him into a world in which the spirit is its own heaven or hell. It is no breach of continuity, though it may be an indication that a better nature was beginning to stir within him. Nor, in common fairness, should we omit to note that, after all, his aim is to save his brethren from *coming into this place of torment*. It is not, as yet, so much their sin, their whole wrong conception of the meaning and purpose of human life, which touches him, as the horrible punishment which he has now discovered that sin to entail.

Even in the description of that punishment there is a slight touch which deepens our conviction that the future life is the continuation and the product of this life. Whatever else may be meant by the phrase which speaks of the rich man's *tongue* as tormented in this flame, we can hardly err in inferring that the organ of sense which he, who had fared sumptuously every day, had most pampered and indulged, is represented as becoming the chief instrument of the retribution which awaited him. The line runs straight on from this life, through death, into the world to come. And the thought is pressed home upon us to which Shakespeare gave a pagan, and therefore an appropriate, expression in the mouth of King Lear :

The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices
Make instruments to scourge us.

And if, in the life to come, our vices are to be our

scourge, shall our virtues find no scope, no reward? The blessed saints are often depicted, and sometimes the cruel dogma is backed up by an appeal to this very Parable, as indifferent to the torments of the lost, as less pitiful and gracious, *i.e.*, than they were while they still wore flesh about them. Few of us, I trust, need any proof that so gross a libel on the devoted and heroic souls who, while they were here, were consumed with zeal for the salvation of men, cannot possibly be true. But if any should need proof, they may find it here. Father Abraham himself refutes the libel. For he tells us that the great gulf is sunk between Paradise and Gehenna in order that those who *would*, *i.e.*, those who are willing and eager to, "pass from hence to you may not be able," as well as that "none may cross from thence to us."

The main truth implied in this phrase is, I suppose, that even after death the sensuous or natural man cannot at once apprehend the spiritual man or receive spiritual things; that, for a time at least, he needs to be scourged by the vices he found so pleasant here; and that, till the discipline be complete and the scourge has done its work, not even those who love him best and would fain suffer with him or for him are allowed to interfere with it. But no man who cares to find in this Parable a proof of the hopeless estate of the lost can refuse to accept *this* proof that, even if *he* feels no pity for them and would make no effort to save them, there are gracious spirits in Paradise who love them so well and pity them so profoundly that, if they could, they

would leave all the joys of Abraham's bosom behind them, and plunge into the torments of Gehenna, to alleviate the miseries of the self-condemned, and to carry but a cup of cold water to cool their parched tongue. And, for one, I think that Lazarus "would" have run on that errand even for the haughty rich man, if father Abraham would have permitted him to go; and that father Abraham "would" have permitted him to go, if he had not known that it would be best in the end for the poor rich man himself that he should take his punishment uncomforted.

Finally, if a poor soul in torment could pray that his five brethren might be saved from torment, and if among the redeemed and happy spirits in Paradise there are at least some who would forfeit its joys in order to carry some little comfort to their brethren in the Pit, are we to believe that the Father of all men will shew less humanity than men made in his own image, or refuse to let those on whom the place of torment and retribution has done its work of discipline pass from thence into the bosom of father Abraham, who still acknowledges them to be his sons? How *can* we believe it? Even though an angel from heaven should teach us that men are more humane than God, love their kinsfolk more dearly, and will do more to serve or save them, how could we, for very reverence, accept his teaching as true?

But these are high matters with which we can only deal in part, because we only see them as through a glass darkly. Let us lay to heart the plain moral of the Parable. Here and now, by the deeds we do, by the

character we form, by the aims we cherish and pursue, we are day by day giving shape and direction to our whole future life ; we are marking out the line, determining the curve, along which our life must move, not only until, but after, it has passed through the point of death. If we live and move and have our being in the mere outsides, the mere shells and husks of things, in the pomps and shows of life, in the mere forms and dogmas of religion, we cannot but pass into an infinite loss and torment when all these things are stripped from us by the pitiless hand of Death : while if we live and move and have our being in the interior realities of life and religion, and seek above all else to grow in wisdom, in goodness, in charity, we cannot but rise into a paradise of wealth and rest and joy when Death conducts us into the world in which these great virtues and graces are the only realities, the only treasure. *Set* your affections, then, not on the things which are seen and temporal, but on those things which are unseen and eternal.

XIV.

THE TRANSFIGURATION.

“And he was transfigured before them.”—MARK ix. 2.

IT is surely remarkable that an event so striking and splendid as the Transfiguration of our Lord should have attracted so little attention as compared with other incidents of his life which can hardly match it whether in importance or significance. As it stands in the Sacred Records it bears all the marks which indicate an event of supreme moment. The three chiefest Apostles—Peter and James and John—are chosen to witness it, as they were afterwards selected to wait on Him through the agony of Gethsemane. If angels ministered to Him at the Temptation, He is here ministered unto by the spirits of just men made perfect. The voice of God is heard, as at the Baptism, declaring, “This is my Son, in whom I am well pleased.” And yet for one sermon preached on the Transfiguration, I should think at least a hundred are preached on the Baptism, or the Temptation, or the Agony in the Garden.

How are we to account for this comparative neglect

of an event so impressive and inspiring? An able and ingenious commentator has suggested that the same apology may be pled for it which is suggested in the Gospels for St. Peter's foolish speech about the "three tabernacles:" "*He wist not what to say* ; and who does know what to say any more than he?" But, after all, is the Transfiguration a more mysterious and difficult theme than that *He* should come to the baptism for repentance who knew no sin? or that *He* should be tempted of the devil in whom the devil had nothing? or that *He* should shrink from the cup his Father gave *Him* to drink, whose sole and chief delight it was to do the will of his Father in heaven?

If mystery, if difficulty, is to repel us, on what leading event in the life of our Lord should we dare to speak? Were *I* to venture on any explanation of the comparative neglect of this wonderful and impressive scene, it would be this: that we regard the Transfiguration as a thing apart, do not recognize its vital connection with the other leading events in our Lord's life, or see how it bears on the work of his redemption; and that we are naturally more concerned with the great events on which the salvation of the race depends than with those which touch it remotely or do not seem to touch it at all. If Christ was baptized, so are we. If *He* was tempted, so are we. If, to will all that the Father wills, *He* must needs pass through an agony, so must we. If *He* died and rose again, so shall we. But are we to be transfigured because *He* was transfigured? Where does that event in his earthly life find its correspondence in ours?

How are we to connect it with anything in our own experience ?

Yet if this be the cause why we so seldom ponder on the excellent glory of the holy mount, it can only spring from our inattention to the records left by those who were "eye-witnesses of his majesty." For the Evangelists are careful to connect the Transfiguration with the work of our redemption. They mark and emphasize the fact that it was a week after Christ had announced that He must suffer many things, and be rejected, and be killed, that "He took three of his disciples, and brought them into a high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them." And though we have no record of what took place during this momentous week, the week which intervened between the day of his first formal prediction of his death and resurrection and the day on which He received honour and glory from God the Father, yet as St. Matthew tells us that "*from that time forth,*" from the very day, *i.e.*, on which He first announced his death to his amazed disciples, "Jesus *began to shew* unto them that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and scribes, and be killed ;" it would seem probable that He spent this week in discussing with them "*the exodus* which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem ;" in dissipating their foolish dream of a military triumph and an earthly empire ; in answering their remonstrances, in soothing their fears, in proving to them the necessity and the expediency of his going away from them, and going by the dark road of death.

Here, as often elsewhere, we must remember that the thought of a suffering Redeemer, who should conquer death by submitting to it, was new and strange to the disciples ; that to hear Jesus say He must needs die must of necessity have been a heavy blow to their faith in Him, since they looked for a Christ who should not stoop to death, but rise to a throne. Nay, we know that it *was* a heavy blow to their faith ; for when St. Peter first heard the sad solemn words fall from the lips of Jesus, he took Him and began to rebuke Him, saying, "God have mercy on thee, Lord ; *this* shall never be unto thee !" What more natural, then, than that He should try to teach them the true meaning of his death for sins during the week which followed his first annunciation of the death of the Cross, and to assure their faith in Him ? And how could this week of teaching rise to a more natural and gracious close than that He should take the leaders of the Apostolic company up into a mountain, and, while talking with Moses and Elijah of the very death which sounded so dreadful to *them*, receive glory and honour from his Father, his countenance shining as the sun, his very raiment becoming white as the snow ; all the pure splendours of his inner nature breaking through the veil of flesh while the Voice from Heaven proclaimed Him the beloved Son, in whose devotion unto death the Father was well pleased ?

One aim, and a leading aim, of the Transfiguration was, then, we may surely say, to renew the shaken faith of the disciples, to shew them what their Master really

was, how great, how glorious in Himself, how beloved of God—the more glorious and beloved because He was about to die, to lay down his life a sacrifice for the sin of the world ; and so to enable and constrain them to say, “He is the true Christ after all ; and though his words staggered *our* faith in Him, yet, see, Moses and Elijah bear witness to Him, and even seem to think He *ought* to die : while, as they are talking with Him of his exodus, Jehovah Himself speaks to us from the bright cloud, and bids us listen to Him even when He speaks of the cross !”

There may have been a second lesson for the disciples in this unique scene, this revelation of the inherent majesty of Christ, though probably a lesson they could not fully learn till He had risen from the dead and sent down his Spirit upon them from on high. If anything could assure either them, or us, that the death of Christ was purely voluntary, a free and willing Sacrifice for our sins, it surely must be the Transfiguration. For this, the Transfiguration, is obviously the natural close of his sinless and perfect life. Death is the consequence and wage of sin. Why, then, should He die who knew no sin, who never at any time transgressed his Father's commandment ? That He should ascend to his Father in the bright cloud which overshadowed Him on the Mount, and which came again on the day of his Ascension to receive Him out of their sight, was but the natural and proper close, the natural and proper culmination of a life like his. If Moses should die in the embrace and by

the kiss of God, as Hebrew tradition affirmed, while yet his eye was not dim nor his natural force abated, and if Elijah should be caught up to heaven as in a chariot of fire, how much more should Jesus—holy, harmless, and undefiled—rise, untouched by death or decay, into the heaven from which He came? It *must* have been by his own free will, by his own free act, that He resigned all this to die, for us men and our salvation, on the Cross, forsaken of God, reviled by men, abandoned even by those who loved Him most. Men had deemed Moses and Elijah blessed, in their end, above their fellows ; but now they themselves come down from the heaven into which God had taken them to speak of an exodus even more blessed and glorious than theirs, and to bear witness to One far greater than themselves who, with all the honours and splendours of life eternal at his command, chooses and prefers to taste of death for every man, that, through Him, every man may receive, if he will, the power of an endless life.

There are moods in which we are tempted to think that *a transfiguration* into life everlasting would have been a nobler, as well as a more natural, close to the life of Jesus than the death of the Cross. And, surely, we must all of us have been tempted at times to wish that such a transfiguration, rather than a translation by death, had been appointed for us and for those dear to us.¹ And only a few moments ago I said that pro-

¹ Nathaniel Hawthorne reports that, as his mother lay a dying, his little daughter often talked of her as "being soon to go to

bably the very Apostles who stood on the Mount took long to learn that the way of the Cross was better both for Christ and for them than an immediate ascent into glory ; that to conquer death by submitting to it was nobler than to evade death and be carried straight into heaven. But surely it is quite plain that Peter at least, though he too thought that to abide with Christ and Moses and Elijah in the radiance of the Divine glory was better than to go down to the plain and suffer with and for men, was quite unfit for the glory he desired. How much of weakness was still blended with his strength, how much cowardice with his courage, how much "hypocrisy" ¹ with his sincerity, we know from his subsequent history ; and by what painful and long-continued discipline he was purged from these old sins. We know therefore how necessary it was that he should come down from the Mount on which he proposed to abide, and submit to the discipline both of life and of death. And who or what are we that we should think ourselves fit for an immediate entrance into the pure splendour of the Divine Presence and Blessedness? Who or what are even those whom we love best and admire most that they should not be the better for the discipline which even the chiefest Apostles required, and by which they were made meet for the everlasting glory ?

God ;" and adds, she probably thinks her grandmother "will be taken away bodily. Would to God it were to be so ! Faith and trust would be far easier than they are now." *Nathaniel Hawthorne and his Wife*, a Biography, by Julian Hawthorne. Vol. I. p. 349.

¹ Galatians ii. 13.

No, it is not our own real welfare, or the highest welfare of those whom we love, of which we are thinking when we wish that they and we should be exempted from any part of the appointed discipline, whether of life or of death ; but, rather, our love of ease for ourselves and for them, our dread of the discipline, so severe and so penetrating, yet so kindly and gracious, by which alone any son or daughter of man can be made meet for heaven.

We may be sure, I think, since Christ lived not for Himself but for others, that the glory came on Him and the Voice spake from the bright cloud for the comfort and teaching of the disciples as well as for his own. Yet who can doubt that in this strange and thrilling scene there was teaching and comfort for the Son of Man. St. Luke tells us that it was "*while he was praying*" that the fashion of his countenance was altered." And who can doubt what the theme of his prayer was? Who can doubt that, as afterwards in Gethsemane, so now on the slope of Hermon, He was crying with strong supplication and tears for a will at one with that of his Father in heaven, a will obedient even unto death? The thought of the Cross had never yet taken such hold on Him as during the week in which He taught his disciples that "the Son of man must be delivered up into the hands of men." What wonder if, as He spake, the prospect of death grew darker, more shameful and more abhorrent, to Him who was the Life indeed? What wonder if, when the week was over, his spirit grew faint within Him, so faint

that He must needs go up into a mountain apart and pray, in order that by communion with his Father He might be reconciled to his Father's will and cheerfully make it his own ?

That this was the substance of his prayer we may infer from the answer it received. *The Transfiguration* was the answer. And in the Transfiguration there were many aids to faith, of which I can only mention two or three.

There was, first, that "glory" which, as St. Peter puts it, "he received from the Father," the glory which comes of a will wholly and consciously at one with that of the Lord of all ; a reminiscence of the glory which He had with the Father before the world was, a foretaste of the glory which was to be his when, having endured the cross, He should go back to his Father. This excellent glory, shining behind the dark cloud of death, and turning that cloud into a mere minister of its pomp, must have been no small solace to the heart of Christ. For this glory was no mere splendour whether of earth or of heaven, but the glory of love and of the work of love ; the blessedness of carrying out the redeeming will of God and bringing back to Him a world that had sinned and gone astray. *This* was a task, an achievement, for which Death and Hades might well be confronted, and all the powers of evil. And to have the glory of that task brought home to a mind saddened and pre-occupied with the suffering and shame which it involved—was not that to give it comfort and strength ?

And, then, to reinforce this first aid to faith and hope

and courage, there was the assurance that, however it might be misunderstood on earth, the way of the Cross was understood and approved in Heaven. The disciples were hard to teach, slow to learn. Their very affection for their Master blinded them to the glory of his great enterprise—the conflict with death by which He was to deliver the whole family of man from the rule and fear of death. But here were Moses and Elijah, just and perfect spirits from the upper world; and *they* understood Him, understood how noble his work was, how much nobler even than their own—an exodus how much more glorious, a rapture how much more splendid! The Lord Jesus *habitually* drew comfort from this heavenly source. When the Pharisees condemned Him for receiving sinners, He comforted Himself with the thought that in the presence of God, in the court of Heaven, there was more joy over one repentant sinner than over ninety and nine just persons who needed no repentance. When even his disciples would have held back the little ones from his arms, He comforted Himself with the thought that their angels always beheld the face of his Father and stood nearest to his throne. And now, when only too evidently He had failed to make his disciples comprehend the mystery of his death, there come to Him Moses and Elijah to discuss that mystery with Him, and to bear witness that the Love which conquers death is the end of the Law and the fulfilling of Prophecy.

God, too, had spoken by the mouth of the Law and the Prophets. Even when they were on earth Moses

and Elijah were friends of God whom He acquainted with his will, from whom He would not hide that which He did. How much more must they know of that Divine and saving Will *now*? Their sympathy in the way and work of the Cross, therefore, carried with it the sympathy and approval of God, and so opened a new source of comfort and strength to the heart of Christ. Nor is He long left to infer the Divine approval from theirs. As at his Baptism, and on the eve of the Crucifixion, the Divine Voice, the Voice from the excellent glory, is heard, and heard proclaiming, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased : hear ye him." But *for what* was the Father pleased with the Son that He thus broke the silence which separates Heaven from earth? in what was it that the disciples were to listen with new heed to Him whom they had already heard and obeyed? Surely the Divine Voice came that they might listen to and believe in Him when He spake of the exodus He was to accomplish at Jerusalem, and trust in Him as the very Messiah although He was about to die. This was the theme in all their minds at the moment; to this, therefore, we may be sure that "the Voice out of the Cloud" would address itself, even if Jesus had not expressly said, "*Therefore* my Father loveth me, because I lay down my life for the sheep."

In all these ways, then, as doubtless in many more, there was teaching and succour both for our Lord and for his disciples in the Voice and the Glory which "came out fo heaven when they stood with him in the holy mount." And hence we may conclude that the Trans-

figuration, so far from being disconnected with the work by which our salvation was wrought, had *this* for its chief purpose and end—to prepare both Christ and his disciples for the great Sacrifice of the Cross, for the death which made Him the Lord and Giver of Life to them, to us, and to all mankind.

We have seen, then, how the Transfiguration fits into the main lines of the life of our Lord, and what part it played in strengthening Him for the work of our redemption. And now we reach the narrower but more practical question : How does it fit into our lives ? what should be its effect on us ? And, practically, I suppose its lesson for us is very much what it was for the Apostles. While it confirms our faith in Him as the true Redeemer of men, it should, above all else, animate us to follow Him in the way of the Cross. In all the Synoptical Gospels this lesson is brought out with striking emphasis. They all shew us that our Lord, after announcing that *He* must needs die, taught his disciples that *they* must die with Him and like Him ; that they too must deny themselves and take up the cross ; that they must lose their life in order to save it ; that to gain the whole world and lose their own souls would be but a sorry exchange : and that if they were afraid or ashamed thus to follow Him, He would be ashamed of them when He came in the glory of his Father and of the holy angels.¹ In all the Gospels these are the solemn words which preface the story of the Transfiguration, and carry the moral which that sublime

¹ Matthew xvi. 21-28 ; Mark viii. 31-38 ; Luke ix. 21-26.

event was intended to illustrate. That moral may take as many forms in our thoughts as it took on the lips of Christ. We may hold that self-sacrifice is the law of the highest life; that we can only rise into the life of love as we deny and crucify the self in us; that we must die to the flesh if we would live and walk in the spirit; that the body must die before we can rise into a sinless and perfect life. But, practically, they all come to this, that we must take up the cross; that, for us, Religion must be a lifelong effort, a lifelong sacrifice. Not in mere enjoyment, even though it be an enjoyment of worship, of growth in knowledge, or of quick spiritual response to fine thoughts and pure impulses, but by toil, by self-denial, by really spending ourselves in the service of God and man, by a constant reaching forth after still higher and nobler aims, do we rise into the life and follow the example of Christ Jesus our Lord.

Try yourselves by this test, then. Ask yourselves whether your religion has yet become a sacred and inspiring reality to you, making toil, pain, sacrifice, death itself, welcome to you, if you may thus win Christ and be found in Him.

XV.

FAITH A CONDITION OF SALVATION.

“He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life ; but he that believeth not the Son shall not see life.”—JOHN iii. 36.

THE Gospel meets us at every turn with an imperative demand for faith. It makes our very life, our very salvation, depend on the exercise and response of faith. Is that demand reasonable ? is it inevitable ? To us it often seems unreasonable, capricious, arbitrary. It sounds as if God were exacting something from us rather than bestowing something upon us ; as if, quite unnecessarily, He were setting our salvation on the hazard of a die which is only too likely to turn against us ; as if He were exposing us to the risk of eternal death simply because He chooses to make eternal life hang on a condition which many of us are sure not to fulfil. “If God really loves us,” we ask, “why does He make our fate depend on a contingency with which He might very well have dispensed, had He cared to dispense with it ?” We feel as though He were putting difficulties in our path, as though He were throwing a barrier across the entrance to the very way in which He yet invites us to walk.

So, again, as we read the Gospels, when we note how the Lord Jesus made faith a condition of miracles, and would do no mighty work except on, or for, those who believed on Him, the same perplexity rises in our minds, and we ask once more, "Why this incessant demand for faith? Why did not He who went about doing good do men good freely, without exacting any tribute from them, and whether they believed in Him or did not?" To some minds indeed this difficulty is so insuperable that they turn our Lord's constant demand for faith into a reason for *not* believing on Him. They say, "We know very well what to think of One who would work no miracle until He could surround Himself with a credulous and excited throng. He would not work them before the incredulous and unbelieving simply because He *could* not, simply because they would have detected and exposed his powerlessness."

Now in a certain sense, and to a large extent, that charge is true, let who will allege it, let who will deny it. Our Lord Himself confessed, the Evangelists frankly admit, not that He would not merely, but that He *could not*—that He was not able to—work miracles in the face of unbelief.¹ But before any sceptic triumphs over that admission, as if it proved his whole case, let him remember that it is not miracles alone which our Lord and his Apostles declare to be impossible apart from the exercise of faith, but salvation also; and not salvation only, but also the communication of any spiritual gift. Let him at least remember that even God Him-

¹ Cf. Mark vi. 5, 6.

self cannot give us what we are unable to receive. And let him consider whether, for the reception of any spiritual gift or power, a hand to take is not as necessary as a hand to bestow ; whether it is consistent either with the goodness of God or the freedom of man that the gates of the soul should be forced open from without instead of being thrown open from within ; whether even the purest light, though it bring health and healing on its wings, can be seen until men open their eyes on it, and whether, even when it is seen, *they* can walk and rejoice in it who love darkness rather than light. What, if faith be the eye of the soul ! What, if faith be the hand of the soul ! In that case is there anything arbitrary or unreasonable in the invariable and imperative demand for faith ? Is it not, rather, inevitable that faith should be the constant condition on which both the reception and the exercise of any spiritual power or grace is made to depend ? Once admit that faith is the eye by which we discern and the hand by which we grasp the realities of the invisible and spiritual world, and the demand for faith becomes wholly reasonable to us, because it is grounded in the very constitution of our nature. With that admission once made, it would be as rational to complain that we can only enter into the ideal world of poetry and art by an effort of the imagination, as to complain that we can only rise into the spiritual realm and possess ourselves of its wealth by the ventures and endeavours of a living and active faith.

Now that this admission must be made, that faith is

the only gate by which we can pass into the spiritual world, the only faculty which renders its realities real to us, you will see, I think, if you consider how far you can get, if at least you are on your way to God, without faith. Reason will do much for you, I admit ; and Conscience, more ; but what I would have you ask is, *How much* they can do for you, and whether it be not their highest function to lead you to a point at which they must hand you over to a higher guide, to the counsels, impulses, and adventures of Faith itself.

Reason, for example, can go far to persuade you that there is a God, the Maker of heaven and earth, who loves and governs all the creatures He has made. Ever seeking for order and cause in the vast complex of phenomena which enfolds us, Reason detects a divine order pervading the entire universe, ascribes the laws which rule all worlds to a single origin, and assumes that, since the spirit in man alone apprehends and dominates all that is material and all the laws by which it is ruled, the throne of the Universe must be occupied by an eternal and almighty Spirit. In short, reason postulates *God*, though it cannot prove Him.

In like manner Reason postulates, though it cannot prove, a living and immortal soul in man—the very word for “man” signifying in different languages “he who *thinks*,” “he who *speaks*,” “he who *looks upward*,” “he who *lives*.” Conscious of that in himself which is other than the body, and more than the body, he calls this higher non-physical element the soul or the spirit. He notes how this inward living spirit pervades, moulds,

and rules the body, how it creates for itself and outlives many bodies in the brief span of three score years and ten; how it asserts its independence of the body in many marvellous ways even while it is in the body, and survives a thousand shocks of change and dissolution: and hence he infers that it will survive even the shock and dissolution of death; that the spirit which has woven and animated and used the body of this flesh will live on beyond the grave, either weaving for itself some more refined and spiritual body, or rising into conditions of being in which it will no longer be trammelled by physical forms and limitations: slipping this mortal coil to assume a purely spiritual mode of activity.

Reason having led us thus far, Conscience takes up and confirms all that reason has assumed or inferred. Every man who sets himself to know his duty, and to do that which is good, becomes aware of a voice within which approves him when he does that which is right and rebukes him when he does wrong. Nothing can be less like himself than this inward monitor and judge, or less subservient to his desires. It speaks with an absolute authority, and condemns him far oftener than it approves. More and more conscious of moral failure and defeat as his standard rises and the years go by, there awakes within him at last a profound and abiding sense of sin, a deep and awful expectation of punishment. This growing sense of sin and this fearful looking-for of retribution go far to convince him that what Reason has suggested must be true: that there must be a God who is watching all that he does and keeping a strict account

of his ways ; and that, since men do not commonly receive the full reward of their deeds in this life, there must be a future life in which the judgment which his heart forebodes will be carried out to the full.

These are the plain and immediate dictates of unassisted Reason and Conscience. They may be, they must be inferences or assumptions ; they *may* even be erroneous inferences and assumptions : but that they are the clear and authoritative dictates of Conscience and Reason the history of mankind puts beyond all doubt. And no man who accepts these postulates of the human reason and conscience as axioms will pronounce it a thing incredible that the God who made us all and loves us all should speak to the men whom He has made, teach them how they may be cleansed from the taints of that guilt of which they are so profoundly conscious, and fit themselves for the immortal life for which they look. He will not deny that the Ruler and Judge of men may speak to them, even though any or all the historic revelations may seem questionable to him.

On the other hand, if even Revelation is not incredible to those who accept the axioms of Reason and Conscience, to those who question their validity, no *proof* is possible. We cannot *demonstrate* God, nor the spirit in man, nor the life to come, to sense ; for the senses, however trained and refined, are incapable of apprehending that which is spiritual. Nor can we demonstrate them as if they were mathematical problems, since they are not problems but axioms, not mathematical but

ethical. Only the spirit in Man can apprehend the Spirit who is above and within man; only the conscience, *i.e.*, only our inward sense of right and wrong can judge and determine what the Perfect Righteousness approves and condemns. So that, quite naturally and inevitably, those to whom the suggestions of the reason and conscience of man carry no proof of God, and of the things of God, must be left without proof. They have rejected the only possible proof: how, then, should they be convinced? They have closed the only gates and windows of the soul that open heavenward: how, then, can they be persuaded that there is a heaven? They have shut themselves up to sensible impressions, and to what logic can infer from those impressions: and how can that which transcends the senses find access to them?

But none of you, I may hope, my brethren, have sunk into that abject condition in which man—so noble in reason, so infinite in faculty—is reduced well-nigh to the level of creatures who have no light save that of sense and instinct. *You* think nobly of the soul. You accept the suggestions of Reason and of Conscience. You admit that there is a God who rules the world. You admit that, when you die, you will not *all* die, that the spirit in you will live on to receive the due reward of the deeds done in the body, whether good or bad. You admit even that God has spoken to men, teaching them how they may find deliverance both from the guilt and the bondage of sin, how they may so live as to live in righteousness and peace for ever. And, admitting

all this, what need have you of faith? why should *your* salvation depend on your believing what you admit to be true?

For many reasons, of which, however, I will only trouble you with two.

First of all, your admission that there is a God who loves you, and who, because He loves you, will judge and punish you for your sins both in this world and in the world to come, in order that He may redeem you to an immortality of righteousness, may not rise to the pitch of certainty. Reason postulates God indeed, but it cannot prove Him. And Conscience forebodes a future judgment, but it cannot prove it. If a man care to doubt, there is always room for doubt. And some men, who would give the world to believe, cannot believe. Though Reason, working on a large scale and speaking by the lips of the wisest and best men of all races, affirms that God *is*, yet some men, not less gifted with reason than their fellows, have always doubted it. And though Conscience, speaking by the same lips and on the same large scale, has always affirmed that God will reward every man according to his works, yet some men, as conscientious as their neighbours, have always questioned that affirmation. And at the present day there are many who, while they will not deny God or immortality, dare not assert either that God *is*, or that we shall live for ever: there are some who even venture to affirm that we have no faculty which enables us to reach truths so high and inscrutable. These men have, and some of them deserve, an influence quite out of proportion to

their number, an influence which none of us can altogether escape. They wake many questions in our minds, and some doubts. At times "we falter where we firmly trod." The altar-stairs that slope to God grow dark to us, or too steep for our feet to climb.

And here comes in our need for faith—for *faith*, not credulity or superstition. For while we thus stand halting in suspense and uncertainty, what should determine which way we turn unless it be our trust in that which is highest and best in us? And does not all that is best and highest in us cry out for God, and claim an immortality of life and righteousness? When our hearts are shaken and disturbed by doubt, what can we do, what ought we to do, but trust in that which was true to the insight of our calmer hours, in that which, in the teeth of all doubt, the universal reason and conscience of man has declared to be true, that which we ourselves are sure we shall ourselves once more feel to be true when our best moods come back to us and our more illuminated hours? If we must doubt, is it not reasonable to lean to that side of the argument which all that is best and deepest in our own nature approves, and which—in general terms, we may say—the whole world of rational and thoughtful men approves?

In *your* hours of doubt, then, let Reason speak, let Conscience speak. Do not demand a kind of proof which is as impossible as it is inappropriate. Do not demand that spiritual realities should be demonstrated by mathematical proof, or made visible to the senses and to the powers which hold by sense. If you distrust

the action of your own reason, or the bias of your own conscience, trust the universal reason of man, the universal conscience, which have always affirmed God to be our Maker and Judge, the Giver both of the life that now is and of that which is to come.

That I take to be the rational course for men who question and distrust their own conclusions. Till the light comes back to them, let them *believe* in the light. Let them trust that what the wise and good have always believed must be true, must at least be the surest form of truth which *they* can reach as yet. And that, after all, is only another way of saying, Let them believe in God, since God is the Life and the Light of men.

Again : Even if you have no doubts, you need faith, imperatively need it ; for, in its relation to that which is spiritual and invisible, faith is both the eye and the hand of the soul. You may admit all that we who believe contend for. You may admit that there is a God who judges and loves you. You may admit that you yourselves will live for ever, and that so long as you live you will receive the due reward of your deeds. You may even admit that God has spoken to you in his Word and by his Son as well as by his Providence and his Spirit, teaching you how you may be saved from your sins and trained for an immortal righteousness. And, with all this, you may still be far from God. Admission is not conviction. Conviction does not invariably imply action, nor action habit, nor does even habit cover the whole of life. There may be no vital connection between your admissions and your conduct,

between your spirit and the truths which Reason postulates and Conscience confirms. You may never have flung yourselves upon them, never have committed yourselves to them, never adventured yourselves upon them, to sink or swim with them, for life or death, for time and eternity. Reason may see, yet not perceive. Conscience may affirm, yet not appropriate. Despite all your admissions, the truths you admit may have no power over you; you may never have welcomed them to the throne of your heart, nor wrought them into the texture of your life. That is to say, you may never have really *believed* in them at all. Truths, in some sense, they may have been to you, for you have never doubted them; but, for you, they have not been the truths they *are* and claim to be. They have not yet been *the* truths, truer and higher than all else, the ruling and governing truths to which all else must give way, the truths by which you are to live and for which you are willing to die.

For, indeed, though all truths even the most abstract are for action, and tell on action, there are truths *and* truths, truths on which it is of lesser and truths on which it is of graver importance that we should act. It is true that two and two make four; and most of you no doubt believe it and act upon it—at least in business. It is true that by industry and skill you may make money; true, that fresh air and exercise contribute to health, and that health is a prime condition of all labour and enjoyment; true, that mental culture adds very largely to our resources and pleasures: and these are truths

which you all admit, though you believe and act upon them with various degrees of energy. But if it be true that there is a God who made and loves us, who is seeking to redeem and will surely judge us ; if it be true that we are to live for ever, and that our future life will take form and colour from the deeds done in the body ; if it be true that we may learn from Christ how we may be freed from the yoke and burden of our sins and raised into a life of eternal righteousness and joy—what truths are comparable with these, or demand of us such instant, stedfast, and resolute activity ?

You *admit* them to be true ! That is very good of you : but what are you the better for the admission if you do not feel their urgency and importance, if you do not fling your whole heart into them and upon them, if you do not suffer them to become the strength and joy of your daily life ? You have got to *believe* them and to rejoice in them, and to commit yourselves to them, if they are to be of any real worth or use to you. You must *act* on them if you would be the better for them, just as you must act on your admission that two and two make four, or that industry earns money and integrity confidence, or that exercise and fresh air contribute to health. For faith is an act as well as an affirmation. It is

an affirmation, and an act,
Which bids eternal truth be present fact.

And how are you the better for the eternal truth that God loves you until it becomes so present a fact to you

that you love Him because He loves you? How are you the better for the eternal truth that you are to live for ever, and for ever to receive the reward of your doings, so long as you take no heed to make your ways and your doings good? How are you the better for the eternal truth that Christ Jesus came into the world to take away the sin of the world, unless you suffer Him to take away your sins, and so make that eternal truth the present and happy fact of your personal experience? Is the poor wretch shuddering in the squalor and loneliness of the workhouse the better off because he never denied that industry and thrift are conditions of independence? Is it any consolation to the miserable sufferer worn out and broken down before his time, racked with pain and burdened with infirmity and disease, that he always admitted that health could only be maintained by the use of means which he has neglected to use?

Eternal truths which we have always admitted, but which, for want of faith in them, we have not made the present and habitual facts of our lives, are no comfort to us, no credit to us; they are simply our condemnation and our shame. The greater they are, the more momentous and urgent we confessed them to be, the more deeply will they condemn us and the more intolerable will be our shame. If, then, you do not *believe*, if, that is, you do not act on the greatest of all truths, if of the truths which you admit to touch you most intimately and affect you most radically, you never say, "I must and will adventure myself on these truths, I

must and will subordinate all else to them, and risk all else for them ;" if you do not take this most reasonable course, judge for yourselves how dreadful must be *your* condemnation, how deep and abiding your shame.

In conclusion, let me sum up the whole argument in a few brief sentences. There are certain simple but fundamental truths of Religion—such as the being, rule, and goodness of God, and the responsibility and immortality of man—which may be reached even by the unassisted Reason and Conscience, since men of every race, apart from Revelation, have reached them, and have clung to them in the face of all doubts and of all the natural fears which their convictions bred in them. But these axioms or conclusions of Reason and Conscience become real, true, substantial to us by Faith, and can only be raised by faith to their due rank and proper power as the supreme and ruling truths by which our whole life is to be dominated and shaped. There is much in us, and much in the world around us, which tempts us to ignore or neglect them, to subordinate them to more immediate aims, to live for the gratification of the senses, the intellect, the imagination, rather than for the culture and gratification of the spirit, to gain such wealth, pleasure, distinction as we may win by lowering ourselves into conformity with the world and the world's law. If these present, visible, and potent temptations are to be resisted, if we are to be drawn up into the high and difficult region in which alone Reason and Conscience attain their full activity, and to walk after the spirit, not after the flesh: if, for

example, we are to devote more thought, time, energy to the cultivation of our spiritual life, to the fellowship and service of God, than to success in our several vocations and to winning a good repute from our neighbours; nay, if we are to value our several vocations mainly, not for the money or distinction they yield us, but for the opportunities with which they furnish us for serving God and man—then the great moral and regulative truths which Reason and Conscience affirm must grow *alive* to us; we must see them in the full charm of their beauty and might, *so* see them that they shall become real to us, and the greatest of all realities, the only realities worth living for and dying for; they must become so true, so real, so precious to us that we can frankly commit ourselves to them and venture our all upon them. That is to say, things invisible must become visible to the spiritual eye; things impalpable must become tangible to the hand of the spirit. Faith must *see* them, and so see them as to be ravished by their spell: faith must *grasp* them, and so grasp them as to make them her own.

The eternal truths, which can only save us by becoming the present and ruling facts of our lives, may be so potent in themselves as to make a sensible and deep impression on our reason, as to imprint and photograph themselves on the surface of the intellect; and Conscience, with its emotional confirmations of the assumptions of Reason, may give them form and solidity, just as the stereoscope lends perspective, and confers rounded and solid form on the photograph placed within it. Yet,

when all is done that Reason and Conscience can do for them, these truths may remain as still and cold and ghastly as the fair landscape on which we gaze through the lenses of a stereoscope, without colour, without motion, without life. But if, as we gaze, Faith comes to the aid of Reason and Conscience, lo, a quickening miracle is wrought ; the whole landscape flashes into life and motion ; the birds sing on the branches, the branches wave in the wind, the liquid and musical waters flow along their bed, the figures stir and pass on their several ways ; and we find ourselves looking into a fair living world of which God is the centre and the light—a world so fair, so noble, so pure and high, that we willingly leave all else that we may abide in it and possess it.

It is by no arbitrary fiat, therefore, by no sovereign and capricious decree that our salvation, our eternal life, is conditioned by faith. The condition is reasonable, inevitable. The reason of it lies in the very constitution of our nature. *Men* can be saved in no other way ; since, for us men, it is faith, and faith alone, which gives substance, reality, life, power, to the spiritual facts and truths of which Reason and Conscience bring us only a dim and questionable report.

XVI.

FAITH AND UNFAITH:

THE TWO MARVELS WHICH ASTONISHED CHRIST.

“And he marvelled because of their unbelief.”—MARK vi. 6.

“When Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people that followed him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.”—LUKE vii. 9.

I SPOKE in my last Discourse of Faith as a condition of Salvation, and tried to shew how reasonable, how inevitable it was, and is, that this condition should be exacted. The task was not so difficult as it seems. For if, as Hartley Coleridge has said,

Faith is an affirmation, and an act,
Which bids eternal truth be present fact,

how shall the eternal truths which Christ came to reveal become the present and ruling facts of our lives except by the affirmation and act of faith? How can we possibly be saved by them until they have become present and living facts to us?

So, again, if faith be the only gate and avenue by

which we can pass into the invisible and spiritual world, or the powers of that world can pass to us, how should these supernal powers come down into this visible world, and work signs and wonders in it, save by this gate and avenue of the soul? In the fact that faith is the only faculty which gives the truths and forces of the spiritual world substance and power, and brings them home to us, we have a sufficient vindication of our Lord's constant and imperative demand for faith, whether He were about to "save" the body or the soul.

In this same fact we have the key to both the passages I have just read from the writings of St. Mark and St. Luke, and to many similar passages. Like the Jews, like the Disciples, we marvel at miracles, at wonders wrought in the visible world, wonders which appeal to and dazzle the senses, rather than at the still greater wonders wrought in the world invisible. To heal a sick body by a word seems more astonishing to us than to restore health to a mind diseased; to calm a tempestuous sea than to still the tumults of the heart; to call the dead from the grave than to quicken a soul dead in trespasses and sins.

Now what men marvel at indicates their character. It shews what manner of spirit they are of, on what level they are moving, how high they have risen, or how low they have sunk on the scale of being. And I do not know that we ever feel the immense interval between ourselves and the Son of Man more keenly than when we compare that which astonishes us with that which astonished Him. To us, as a rule, the word Miracles

denotes mere physical wonders ; and these are so wonderful to us as to be well-nigh incredible. But in Him they awake no astonishment. He never speaks of them with the faintest accent of surprise. He set so little store by them that He often seemed reluctant to work them, and openly expressed his wish that those on or for whom they had been wrought would tell no man of them. So far from regarding them as strange or unnatural, or even as supernatural, they appeared to Him perfectly natural and simple. There is no sign of effort or strain about Him as He works them ; no, not even when He bids the storm be still, or summons Lazarus from his charnel cave. "He speaks, and it is done ; he commands, and it stands fast." And when the miracle is wrought, so far from boasting of it or appealing to it, or in any way making much of it, He makes light of it, or even takes pains to hush it up, lest it should leave a false impression of what He was and what He came to do. What *does* astonish Him is not these outward wonders so surprising to us, but that inward wonder, the mystery of man's soul, the miraculous power which we often exercise without a thought of surprise, the power of shutting and opening that door or window of the soul which looks heavenward, and through which alone the glories of the spiritual world can stream in upon us. Only twice are we told that *He* marvelled to whom all the secrets of Nature and Life lay open ; once at the unbelief of men, and once at their faith. When He came to his own, and they received Him not, He was driven from his wonted calm by an immeasurable

surprise : He marvelled at their unbelief. And, again, when He came to those to whom He was a Stranger, and they took Him in, He was beyond all measure astonished : He marvelled at their prompt and vigorous faith.

How consistent it was with all we know of Him that the only wonders which amazed Him should lie in the ethical workings of the spirit in man, and not in his control over the elements and forces of nature, and how high this intense and exclusive regard for ethical and spiritual wonders raises Him above us, I will leave you to judge for yourselves. For my present aim is not to convict you of your unlikeness to Him, but, if it be possible, to make you so far of one mind with Him as that you shall marvel at the only wonders which astounded Him.

I. First, then, I would have you marvel at your own *unbelief*. For Christ comes to "his own" whenever the eternal truths He taught appeal to those who have been trained to receive them by the activity of reason and conscience. And *you* have been thus trained. You know, for example, that the reason of man postulates God, though it cannot prove Him ; that, speaking generally, speaking of what it has done on a large scale, in the most cultivated races, and the most illuminated centuries, and the highest intellects, we may say that reason assumes the existence of an almighty all-ruling Spirit as the cause of all phenomena, as the secret of the order which pervades the universe. Speaking on the same scale, and taking no note of the exceptions which

prove the rule, we may also say that reason assumes the existence of a spirit in man by which he is related to that infinite and creative Spirit which sits behind all phenomena and works through them all. You know, too, that what reason suggests and assumes, conscience confirms. In its censures and condemnations of our sins, in its fearful looking-for of a judgment to come, it bears no doubtful witness to the existence and rule of a Judge higher than itself, and prophesies with no doubtful voice of a life beyond the grave in which every man will receive the due reward of his deeds.

When, therefore, Christ comes to you, He comes to *his own*. When He reveals a God who is your Father, and who cares for you and guides you through all the intricacies of change and time; when He speaks to you of a God who is your Saviour, who is ever seeking to redeem you from your bondage to sin and weakness; when He invites you to turn to the God who loves you and to let Him redeem you from your bondage, to trust in Him and cast all your care on Him—He simply invites you to believe, *i.e.*, to affirm and to act on, the eternal truths which reason and conscience have already made familiar to you. The assumptions of reason and the forebodings of conscience have not sufficed to make these eternal truths real to you, so real as that they have become the present and governing facts of your lives, so real that you have adventured your whole fortune and fate upon them, whether for this world or for the world to come. And yet you can only be saved by them, saved from care, saved from fear, saved from guilt, saved

even from the censure of your own reason and the sting of your own conscience, as you affirm them with your whole heart and act upon them with an undivided energy. Because He would save you, Christ demands *faith* of you, faith in the truths which alone can save you. For how can He save you from the forebodings of guilt until you trust in the forgiving and redeeming love of God your Saviour? How can He save you from the fret of care and the tremours of fear except by winning you to trust in the tender and gracious providence of God your Father?

He looks into your souls and sees that there is but one faculty by which you can so lay hold of the eternal truths He has revealed or confirmed as to make them the present, ruling, and redeeming facts of your daily life. He sees that though you have some dim perception of them, they can only trouble and rebuke you until, at the touch of faith, they waken into life and clothe themselves with power. He sees that only by the door of faith in these truths can you pass in out of the reach of care and fear, guilt and shame. He sees that even you yourselves are aware that there is no other way of escape from them. How, then, should He not marvel at your unbelief—your unbelief in the very truths which you know to be the only truths worth living for and dying for? Here is a door beyond which you will find, and know that you will find, the rest you crave, rest from the cares which fret and fever your spirit, rest from that haunting fear of guilt and shame which casts its cold shadows on your soul; and yet you will not go

through it! Can you marvel that He marvels to see you stand shivering and reluctant on this side of an open gate through which you may pass, and know that you may pass, into a new world—a world in which care and fear and guilt are unknown; *you* who are so weary of your cares, so sick of your fears, so ashamed of your very shame? As you think of it, do not you yourselves marvel at the very unbelief which grieves and amazes Him?

It is not as if you doubted the eternal truths which He beseeches you to make present facts. *You* believe that there is a God. You look for a life and a judgment to come. You confess that nothing can be more reasonable and just than that, sooner or later, every man should get the due reward of his deeds, although you may dread to receive the reward of many of the deeds you have done. You even believe that, despite your sins, God is still your Father and cares for you, and has sent his Son to prove his love for you and to save you from your sins. To act on these truths and to rest in them, to draw them down out of the invisible world into this present world of home, business, politics, would be, as you admit, your salvation. And yet you do not act on them, do not rest in them! Nay, even those of you who do believe in them, do not so believe in them as to let them save you from all sin, from all anxiety, from all fear! Even to you the eternal truths have not become present, all-ruling, all-conquering facts. You marvel and are ashamed of your own unbelief: and Christ marvels at it even more than you.

2. If self-condemnation will rouse you to a more resolute faith in the truths you admit or believe, you will do well to rebuke and condemn yourselves for your want of faith, or for the weakness of your faith. But mere self-condemnation, if it stand alone, is by no means likely to rebrace the energies of a halting and irresolute soul. Suffer me, then, to remind you that, if you are wondering at and condemning yourselves, you are at least so far forth of one mind with Christ as that *you* marvel at the very wonder which astonished *Him*. Let me also remind you that He marvelled at the *faith* of men as well as at their unbelief.

When the Roman centurion professed that all the forces of Nature and of Life were as much at the control of Jesus, and stood as ready to obey his word, as the soldiers of his own cohort or the servants of his own household to obey his commands, Jesus marvelled at the greatness of his faith. And when the witty Syrophœnician woman, admitting that she was not one of the children of God whom He could ask to his table, pleaded that Christ might at least throw her a crumb from that bountiful board, once more He was astonished at a faith so unexpected and so strong. For these two, the Roman master and the Syrophœnician mother, were not "his own" in the sense in which the sons and daughters of Israel were his own. "The adoption, and the Shekinah, and the covenants and the law, and the worship, and the promises, and the fathers," did not pertain *to them*. *They* had not been trained in the Divine household. They did not inherit the pious instincts and

traditions of a long ancestral line. They had not been nurtured and illumined by special disclosures of Truth and Grace. Yet they cast themselves on Christ with a faith such as He had not found in Israel itself. In them, faith was in very deed "an affirmation and an act which bade eternal truth be present fact."

Now I am very far from wishing to palliate your want of faith, or to set you on excusing the weakness of your faith. Nevertheless I must, in common fairness, ask you to consider whether there is no heathen or Pagan element even in you; whether, besides the reasonable, moral, and spiritual nature in you, there is not a carnal nature which is adverse to it, a nature which takes many forms and lusts against the spirit in many ways. Ah, you know only too well that in the complex being which you inherit from your fathers, if there is much that is good, there is also much which is evil; and that if many of your conditions have been favourable to the development of your higher nature, many of them have tended to foster that which is lowest in you, and even that which is most hateful to you. You have inherited taints of blood, and defects of will, and stings of sensual desire. There is that in you which instantly and strongly responds to the temptations of the world around you. You are tormented by passions, cravings, tempers, evil bents and inclinations of nature, which render it very hard for you to live above the world and the world's law, and to commit yourselves without reserve to the promptings of your spiritual part, so that you shall see God everywhere and serve Him in all you do.

In how many worlds do we all live ! The world of home, the world of business, the worlds of literature and art, of thought, of imagination, of the affections, the worlds of fashion, of neighbourhood, of civic and political life. All these worlds, and many more, have some claim upon us, and lay their hands on some inward bent which responds to their touch. And how hard is it for us to rise, sheer through them all, straight to God, and then to come back into them all bringing Him with us, to guide us through them, and so to sustain us in them as to sanctify them all to the growth and culture of the spirit.

Yes, there is much to hold us back from the life of faith. And when you walk unspotted by the taints of the several worlds through which you have to take your way, content amidst poverty because of your inward wealth, at rest under stress and care because you have a Friend in heaven who cares for you, cheerful under your burden of sorrow because you believe that even sorrow is but joy in the making, fearless in death because you know that death is but birth into a new and larger life, O, then, I think that God Himself must marvel at your faith as much as you sometimes marvel at your unbelief.

And yet, when you have attained this faith, and have felt that it is life, strength, rest, peace for the soul, how mere a trifle will suffice to bring you down from the height to which you have soared. Some new access of desire, some new object of affection, some new form of activity, or some new prospect of success in business ;

or, on the other hand, some unexpected loss, or some new anxiety for yourselves or for those whom you love : in short, any cloud, however small, that sails for a moment between you and the sun, and you, who but now were singing in the sweet clear air of heaven, sink down to earth, shudder back into your old fears and cares, and forget the very God whom you have seen and the salvation in which He has caused you to trust.

If, then, your faith is to be maintained and to do its perfect work upon you, saving you from all fear, all care, all sin, it must be your constant study and effort to translate the eternal truths into present facts. You give, and rightly give, much thought to the toils of your daily occupation, to the cultivation of your minds, to the management of public affairs. Whether you give as much time and thought to the study of the Scriptures in which you know you have eternal life as to the reading of your newspapers and magazines ; whether you are as bent on a close and tender intercourse with the Father of your spirits and the Saviour of your souls as with the wife, husband, friend, child, whom you love best ; whether you are as resolute to serve God and to get his pure and kindly will done in your daily business as you are to succeed in it and to make money by it, I must leave you to determine for yourselves. But I am bound to warn you that, standing as you do amid many temptations, exposed to many distractions, liable to many changes and cares and fears, the life of the soul—that faith in God and in the truth and love of God

which alone can redeem you from all care and fear and guilt—is not to be maintained save by much study, stedfast and vigorous endeavour, and many devout prayers, not for Divine help alone, but also for grace to use it when it comes.

XVII.

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS WHICH IS BY FAITH.

“For what saith the Scripture?¹ And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness.”—ROMANS iv. 3.

IF the Lord Jesus marvelled at the unbelief of men, we, in our turn, are tempted to marvel at the immense importance which the Bible everywhere attaches to faith. And, above all, we marvel to hear that faith is accepted as a substitute for righteousness. When we read that Abraham's faith was reckoned to him for righteousness, and, still more, when we hear St. Paul arguing that in every case “to him that worketh not, but believeth in him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is reckoned for righteousness,” we are apt to think that “good works” are made light of, that morality is endangered or even

¹ The Scripture referred to by St. Paul is, of course, *Genesis* xv. 6, where we read, “And he believed in the Lord, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness.” But for us the question may have a wider scope ; for not only in the Book of *Genesis* and in the Epistle to the Romans, but also in *Galatians* (iii. 6) and in *James* (ii. 23) we find the identical words of the text, “Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness !”

undermined. Such a doctrine, it is said, abolishes the immutable distinctions of right and wrong. If the ungodly are to be accounted righteous simply because they believe certain facts or truths, what profit hath godliness? and why should we brace ourselves to a stedfast, arduous, and painful endeavour to lift our lives into correspondence with the will of God?

No doubt the objection is often taken, in the interests of morality and godliness, by those who are not at all remarkable for the godliness, or even for the pure and high morality of their lives. None the less it is a weighty objection, whether the lips that frame it be pure or impure. It sets forth a real and grave difficulty, a difficulty which at some time and in some form, can hardly have failed to burden and perplex our thoughts. Let us look it fairly in the face, then, and see whether we can find an answer to it that shall be satisfactory and complete.

At the outset I must frankly admit that the doctrine of "justification by faith," or of "imputed righteousness," has often been stated in forms repugnant to human reason and fatal to morality. Some theologians, indeed, have avowedly made it their aim so to formulate most of the great truths of Religion as to "shock human reason and humble human pride." And, no doubt, theologians of this school have spoken of imputing the sins of the believer to Christ, and of imputing the righteousness of Christ to the believer, in terms injurious alike to God and man. In their hands it has sunk into a legal, but inequitable, transaction—a transaction in which the letter

of the Divine Law is used to evade, rather than to fulfil, its spirit. Just as an unscrupulous lawyer or politician has sometimes boasted that he could "drive a coach and four" through an Act of Parliament intended for the restraint and punishment of crime, so even the pure and holy Son of God has been represented, by his professed friends and advocates, as driving his coach, with all the elect crowded upon it inside or out, through the barriers which Almighty Justice had erected against the sinful and disobedient.

No weight of authority, scriptural or ecclesiastical, can uphold such dogmas as this. The human conscience instinctively rejects them. Insulted reason spurns them. If no more rational account can be given of the affirmation of Scripture, that faith is reckoned for righteousness, so much the worse for Scripture ; for that cannot be the voice of God which teaches a lie : and how *can* any man be saved by the mere "imputation" of a goodness which he does not share ? How can any man be really saved from evil except by being made good—good at heart, good in life ?

Nor is this simply a question of theology and of the Schools. If it were, we might well pass it by. It is a question that comes down into the streets, into our practical life, and confronts us as we go about our daily business. For which of us, even though it present no difficulty to him, has not met with those to whom this apparent confusion of faith with righteousness has been a very real and grave perplexity ? Which of us has not seen it urged in Sceptical or Infidel writings as a

well-nigh insurmountable objection to the Christian creed ?

1. Now in attempting to meet this objection, we shall do well to begin, indeed we can hardly but begin, with the call of Abraham ; for Abraham's is the *premier* case in both senses of the word ; it is the first of which we have any record, and it is also of the first importance.

In the Book of Genesis, then, we are told that Jehovah appeared to Abraham to promise him two gifts which were quite out of the ordinary course of things, each of which must therefore have seemed to be quite incredible. First, He promised the goodly land to a man who had no title to it, and no inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot upon. And, then, to a man old as well as childless, to a man "as good as dead already," He promised a seed as numerous, or rather as innumerable, as the stars in the sky or the sands upon the shore. Incredible as the double promise was, Abraham believed it, because he "believed in the Lord" who made it. He proved the sincerity of his faith by offering the sacrifice (Gen. xv. 8-21) by which the promise and his acceptance of the promise were to be ratified. And as he presented the sacrifice Jehovah entered into a solemn covenant with him, and pledged Himself to keep his word.

From the Jewish point of view "righteousness" may, no doubt, be attributed to every man whose sacrifice has been accepted by God and with whom He has entered into a covenant. And if we had only the Jewish

Scriptures before us, we might reasonably argue that Abraham's faith in the Divine Word, a faith which expressed itself in the offering of the required sacrifice, was reckoned to him for righteousness simply because it released him from the claims and penalties of a broken law, simply because it made him ritually or legally righteous before God. But the New Testament Scriptures will not permit us to rest in this simple and easy solution of the difficulty. They see, and teach us to see, in Abraham's faith or righteousness, a great deal more than a mere exemption from the pains and penalties of the Law. They see, and teach us to see, in it the power of a blameless and of an endless life. They hold it up as the model and standard of *our* faith. They recur to it again and again with most impressive iteration. They assert it to have been the animating and redeeming principle of his character and conduct. They trace its influence not only on one, but on every, critical moment and event of his career. And thus they compel us to look for a deeper and more adequate solution of the difficulty, for a moral and spiritual solution rather than for a merely legal and ceremonial solution.

2. But where is such a solution to be found? Well, surely, if it can be shewn that Abraham's faith *was* righteousness, it will no longer seem strange to you that his faith was reckoned to him *for* righteousness. If faith *is* righteousness, you will no longer fear lest the imputation of righteousness should endanger morality, and render men careless how they live so long as they believe.

What, then, do you mean by "righteousness"? You mean "doing that which is right"—do you not? Habitual right doing is the fact for which "righteousness" is the abstract term. Suppose, then, that Abraham habitually did that which it was right for him to do—did it in all the great crises of his life; did it when it was very hard to do, when it could only be done at great cost; did it when custom, self-interest, authority, reputation, safety, all urged him to leave it undone: suppose that in these critical and adverse conditions he did that which was right purely at the impulse and prompting of faith—was it not in that case only reasonable and just that his faith should be reckoned to him for *what it was*, *i.e.*, for righteousness?

But that supposition is strictly and demonstrably true. The first notable and distinguished action of his life was his renunciation of the idolatrous worship in which he had been bred for the service of the only true and living God. In some mysterious way the conviction was borne in upon his mind that sun, moon, and stars, lords which change and set, could not be the true lords of men, that the true Lord could only be He who made them all; and, forthwith, he resisted the whole pressure of habit and custom, opinion and authority, to worship One whom he knew as the Judge of all the earth. A noble and heroic act of faith, you admit. Yes, but was it not also an equally noble and heroic act of righteousness? However the conviction reached his mind that he ought to worship none but the Maker and Ruler of all, yet, since this conviction commended itself to his

reason and conscience, was it not *right* of him to act upon it? Was it not hard, as well as right? Would it not have been unjust if this great act of faith had *not* been reckoned to him for righteousness?

Another act of faith which the New Testament holds up to our admiration is this: that when Abraham was called to leave his native land, with all its sacred and clinging associations, he went out from it, not knowing whither he went. But was not this act of faith, also, an act of righteousness? Will any man deny either that it was right of him to obey what he took to be a Divine call, or that it was hard to obey such a call as this? Can any man doubt that, if right acts are to count for righteousness, the faith which prompted Abraham to leave his ancestral pastures might well be reckoned to him for righteousness?

And so we might go through all the acts of faith to which the New Testament calls our admiring attention—his sojourn in the promised inheritance as in a strange country, his hope of the promised seed when all hope seemed to be taken away, his readiness to offer up the child of the promise because he knew that God was able to raise him up from the dead: and of each of these acts we might severally demand, Was it not *right* that Abraham should do it? Was it not hard as well as right? And is it not most just that he should have the credit of the right acts he did, and be credited with the more for them because they were so hard to do? Looking at his whole life, illustrated by so many noble and heroic deeds, I do not see how we are to escape the con-

clusion that, since faith was the ruling and animating principle of his life, it was only reasonable and fair that his faith should be reckoned to him for righteousness, on the plain and rational ground that it actually made him righteous.

On precisely the same ground we justify St. Paul's broad principle that to "every one that believeth" faith is reckoned for righteousness. Reason, Conscience, Religion, combine to persuade us, as they persuaded Abraham, that there is a God, that He rules over all, that the Judge of all the earth must be just, and that in his justice He will, here or hereafter, render to every man the due reward of his deeds. But they do more for us than they did for him. They also persuade us that God is good, and that in his goodness He has set Himself to make us good, both by taking away our sins and by implanting living principles of virtue in our hearts. They invite us to cast all our cares, all our fears, all our sins on Him, and so to make our wills one with his that our will may be done whenever his will is done whether in earth or heaven. Now if we believe these truths, if by faith they become sacred and august realities to us; if, because our sins are taken away, we set out with unembarrassed energy on the way of life, duty, peace; if, because we no longer have any cares for the body or the soul, the present or the future, time or eternity, ourselves or our neighbours, we are prepared to follow God wherever He may lead us, to do without whatever He takes from us, and to accept whatever comes to us through following Him as the very best

and kindest expression of his will for us ; if, in short, we live what we admit to be a life of faith in God, may not our faith be reasonably reckoned to us for righteousness? It *is* our righteousness, for it is *making us righteous* ; and yet it is *not* ours, but *God's*, since it is his truth which we believe, his power in which we trust, his grace which lifts our wills into harmony with his.

3. But, it may be objected, Abraham was not perfect ; nor are we. In the great acts of his life he exhibited an heroic faith, and rose to rare and difficult heights of righteousness. None the less he had his faults. There were moments in his career when he fell beneath even the commonest standard of morality. And as for us, if there are times in which our faith lays hold on God and makes eternal truths the present and ruling facts of our lives, there are also times when we relax our hold of Him, and the very truths we most sincerely believe lose their power over us, and we fall away into many and heinous sins. How, then, can *our* faith, how can even *his* faith, so much greater than ours, be reckoned for a righteousness which it does not invariably secure ?

It is not difficult to answer that objection if only we remember that it is *faith* we are speaking of, a genuine and vital faith, not of any mere profession or pretence of it. For if we are speaking of the faith which bids eternal truth be present fact, are we to charge it with all the errors and frailties of unbelief? It is your faith, not your want of faith, which is reckoned for righteousness. And, by its very definition, faith *is* righteousness ; that

is to say, faith is the quality, motive, principle which makes you do what is right, in so far as you *do* do it.

Here, however, some man will be sure to say : That is all very well so far as Faith is concerned, or even so far as the teaching of the New Testament is concerned. Faith may fairly be taken for righteousness since, so far as they possess it, it makes men righteous. But it leaves *us*, in whom faith is not a strong and constant power, just where we were ; nay, it leaves all men, even Abraham himself, just where they were.

But, consider : it is something to know that God is righteous, even if we also know that we are unrighteous. It is something to have vindicated the New Testament teaching, even if we can only vindicate it by condemning ourselves. And how can we but condemn ourselves if we are conscious that faith is so weak in us as that in much we are still unrighteous ?

In such a case self-condemnation seems to be our only appropriate attitude. And yet, thank God, it is *not*. For, while a consciousness of weak and halting faith should prompt us to condemn ourselves, it should also prompt and constrain us both to hope and to endeavour. That faith is weak in us is our shame and reproach ; but that faith *exists*—in this there lie boundless possibilities of hope and recovery.

For “the righteousness which is by faith,” is simply the only righteousness possible to man. We often speak as if righteousness and faith might be pitted against each other, or as if righteousness might be attained in

some other way. But who ever met with a perfectly righteous man—a man whose whole life was conformed to the highest moral ideal which even he himself could frame? The best of men is but a man at the best ; and the better he becomes the more conscious he grows of his faults, his frailties, his sins. In so far as he is righteous, he is righteous by virtue of faith, faith in some moral standard of right and wrong which he has never seen embodied, by his belief that it will be well with him only as he attains or approaches that ideal standard of conduct.

And this faith, wherever it is real and sincere, has a singular power of growth. Remember how it grew in Abraham, grew until we may fairly say that it dominated his whole life, grew until, in the striking phrase of St. James, he became “the *friend* of God,” and walked as seeing Him who is invisible. Faith *was* righteousness in him, for it led him to do much that was right, though it was also hard ; but it was also the root and germ of a larger and more perfect righteousness. It grew by use till, for him, it was the visible world that became a dream, and the world invisible the only reality. And if *our* faith in the invisible things of God, of truth, of duty, be vital and sincere, it will grow in like manner by use and practice. It *must* grow, if it be alive—must make the unseen ever more real to us, more influential over us, until by faith our whole being is drawn into conformity with the righteous will of God.

But if that be so, if all real faith in God makes us do that which is right, and if all real faith in Him is the

root and germ out of which "the white flower of a blameless (and a perfect) life" must spring at last, who does not see that faith, so that it be genuine and sincere, may fairly be imputed to us for righteousness? God is our Judge, and not man. And what is the use of having *Him* for our Judge, if He is not to look clean through all the confusions and contradictions of our life, and to mark what is the vital principle which is moulding it and which must give it its final shape? Nay, to what purpose is He our judge if He may not see *what is to be* in us as well as what is, and frame his judgment of us as we should gladly frame our judgments of our neighbours could we but see as far as He can see, could we but "see the future in the instant"? If *we* could look into the heart of any man, and discern a principle at work within him which is already making him do right when it is very hard to do it, a principle which is sure to bring him altogether right in the end, should we scruple to account him a righteous man, simply because as yet that vital and dominant principle had not wrought its perfect work upon him? If not, shall we not commit ourselves to the just witness and pure eyes of Almighty God without fear, if at least we do sincerely believe in Him, if, in our faith, we have a power leading us to righteousness, and a pledge that we shall attain a perfect righteousness before all is done? Can we not understand even how, though a man die before faith has had time to work a conspicuous change upon him, yet even to him faith may fairly be counted for righteousness by the all-seeing God, who in every fresh beginning of

life beholds the end to which it will grow? Take the extremest case. Suppose a man to have walked by sight, and not by faith, to the very close of his career. Suppose that it is only as he is dying that the eyes of his mind are opened on the sacred realities of the spiritual realm, but that then he gathers up all his force and lays hold upon the truth and grace which are capable of redeeming him from all evil. Dare we, who remember the response of Christ to the prayer of the Penitent Thief, say that even in such a case as this the doors of hope will be closed, and justly closed against him?¹ Why, if we ourselves were the guardians of those doors, we should not have the heart to shut them in his face, though we might open them with fear and trembling. But God reads the thoughts and intents of the heart. *He* can see that the change in the dying penitent is a vital, a radical change, and only needs time and opportunity to become complete. And would you have God

¹ The thought that even the worst of sinners *may* be thus arrested at the last moment has been finely expressed by Browning, in *The Ring and the Book*, where he makes the old Pope say :

For the main criminal I see no hope
Except in such a suddenness of fate.
I stood at Naples once, a night so dark
I could have scarce conjectured there was earth
Anywhere, sky or sea or world at all ;
But the night's black was burst through by a blaze—
Thunder struck blow on blow, earth groaned and bore
Through her whole length of mountains visible :
There lay the city thick and plain with spires,
And, like a ghost dishrouded, white the sea.
*So may the truth be flashed out by one blow,
And Guido see, one instant, and be saved.*

refuse him time and opportunity? Can you affirm it to be unreasonable and unjust that the faith, which would make the man righteous at the last, should not at once be reckoned to him for righteousness? Will you, who are yourselves burdened with sin and incompleteness, murmur and complain if he is admitted on the very day of his repentance into a Paradise in which he may still suffer for his sins, and *must* suffer for them if he is ever to be quit of them, but in which also the new principle and bent of his being will be aided to unfold itself in all forms of virtue and goodness?

Finally, take your own case. You believe in God, and in the truths which He has revealed. But the action and growth of your faith is checked, not only by habits which you yourselves have framed, but also by taints and bents of will which you inherit from your fathers, by the imperfect training and culture which you have received, and by many unfavourable conditions for which you are not responsible, or are not wholly responsible. Is it not fair, then, that some account should be taken of these, that some allowance should be made for them? Can you doubt that the Judge of all the earth, the omniscient and gracious Ruler of men, will make full allowance for them all; and that, if He sees your faith to be sincere and active, sees that it is really making you righteous, and in happier conditions will at last make you perfect, He will reckon your faith to you for the righteousness which He sees that it will yet work out in you?

My brethren, we have only to understand what is

meant, what is implied, in the words "faith," "righteousness," "God," to see how just and reasonable, as well as how gracious, it is, that to every one who believeth in Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith should be reckoned for righteousness.

XVIII.

FAITH A CONDITION OF PLEASING GOD.

“Without faith it is impossible to please him.”—HEBREWS xi. 6.

BUT *why*—why is it impossible to please God without faith? Why is *faith* an indispensable condition of salvation? There are some who tell us that, since faith is the condition on which it has pleased God to make our salvation depend, we have no right to demand any reason for it beyond his good-will and pleasure. There are others who tell us that there *is* no other reason for it, that it is a purely arbitrary condition, but that, as we cannot change it, we had better submit to it. And there are many more who think, if they do not say, that had it pleased God to save us in any other way, it would have been easy for Him to suspend our salvation on some other condition than this.

It will be my endeavour to shew you once more, and from a slightly different point of view, that, whatever men may say or think, faith is the natural, reasonable, inevitable condition of salvation; that without faith it is, in the strictest sense of the word, *impossible* that we should please Him.

Now, what is faith? There are many definitions of the word, but no one of them is complete and exhaustive, or, if it be complete in itself, it does not at once convey an adequate conception of faith to our minds. Before we can reach such a conception, we must let our minds play freely upon it; we must turn it round and look at it in various lights. For faith is an act, mood, habit, posture, or bent of the soul which has many relations and plays many parts. It is related, for example, to the past, to the present, to the future; and perhaps we cannot do better than consider it in this group of time-relations if we would apprehend what it really is.

I. Consider faith, then, first, as it looks back, in its relation to *the past*. "By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which do appear" (the phenomenal of the apparent); but owe their being to the creative fiat of the Almighty. By faith, moreover, we understand not only that this and all worlds were made by God, but also that men have been led through the long vicissitude of the human story by the very Hand which created them; that it is God who has fixed "the bounds of their several habitations," not simply any wandering impulse of the blood, or any pressure of necessity, or any result of strife; and God who has determined "the epochs of their development," not merely the presence or the absence of auspicious conditions (Acts xvii. 26).

Now *this* is not the conclusion of reason, but of that

more divine and penetrating quality of the soul which we call Faith. That we do not owe the conviction that the world was made by God to reason alone, though reason abundantly confirms it, we may infer from the fact that some of the most gifted and cultivated minds among us affirm that, so far from being created by the word of God, the world has been fashioned by some inscrutable Force, acting by law on a protoplasmic substance as eternal, and as underived, as itself. That we do not owe to reason solely our conviction that the human race has been trained and educated by God, we may infer from the fact that there are reasonable men among us who affirm that the various races of men, with all their wonderful endowments of life, thought, emotion, conscience, have been evolved from molecules which possess neither life nor intelligence, neither affection nor conscience ; and that the bounds of their habitation and the epochs of their development have been determined by their environment and their collisions with each other. If then the Force behind Nature be an intelligent, kindly, and almighty Will, if the history of man is being conducted on an orderly and beneficent plan, we can discover that Will and trace its plan only by the intuitions and inspirations of faith. A man may have reason, his reason may be vigorous and cultivated, and yet he may see no divine and creative Power at work in the natural world, no revelation of the will of God in the story of man. But no one who has faith can possibly fail to find God whether in nature or in human history. By *faith* we understand that the world was

made by God, and that man has been led and trained by God.

2. Faith looks round ; it has relation to *the present*. If a man stedfastly regard himself and his own conditions and the world in which he plays a part, he *may*, if he take reason for his sole guide, arrive at the conclusion that he is where and what he is as the result of a long sequence of physical and social antecedents for which he is not responsible ; that in his nature, in which so many vigorous and opposed forces are at strife, it is inevitable, and even right, that the strongest force should win the day, whatever it may be : and that, therefore, right and wrong, sin and duty, are mere words, mere figments, the inaccurate and unhealthy superstitions of a bygone and ignorant age to which it would be folly to submit. As you know there are those—and they contrive to make a noise in the world out of all proportion to their number or their weight—to whom this conclusion is the last and highest result of modern thought, while there are many more who at least lean in that direction. But to *faith* such a conclusion is as impossible as it is alien and abhorrent. As faith looks round on the shows of Life and Time, it sees that the toys for which many struggle—wealth, notoriety, distinction, amusement—are not the main ends of life, nor its best gifts ; but insight, character, conduct, a heart at leisure from itself, the pure affections of the home, the charity which is always ready to serve or comfort a neighbour, a pious and cheerful adoption of the will of God, a thankful and generous enjoyment and use of

his gifts. It sees *God* at work in the vast complex of conditions by which we are surrounded, and in the various forces by which we are impelled ; and hence it pronounces much to be right which is very difficult to us, and much to be wrong which is very pleasant, and will give us no rest nor peace till we have made duty, duty to God and man, our chief end and ruling aim.

In the present, as in the past, Faith looks quite through the shows of things to the sacred realities which stand behind them, and to God Himself as the Author and Source of all that is real, of all that does not change with changing time, of all therefore which is really and enduringly good. In short, to use words which by this time must be very familiar to you,

Faith is an affirmation, and an act,
Which bids eternal truth be present fact.

3. Faith looks forward ; it has a relation to *the future*. It is "the substance," or "the assurance," of things hoped for, that in which they inhere, and by which they are brought home to us. And here, once more, faith shews a more penetrating and discerning eye than reason, while yet reason warrants and approves all that faith discovers. Left to itself, or divorced from faith, its natural consort, Reason, as it looks onward to things to come, to things hoped for, *may* see in death nothing but an extinction of the personal life. Its highest and happiest conception for the future may be, that the human race will continue to develop into nobler proportions long after we are forgotten, and to shift into

more favourable conditions, until the sun shall have exhausted its store of heat, and the earth be frozen to death. This *is* the conclusion which reason has reached in some of the most active and generous of living minds. But this conclusion also is impossible to faith. As Faith looks stedfastly onward, it discovers that even death itself is but a phenomenon, not a reality; a passing show the secret of which is "more life and fuller;" a mere veil which hides from us things too great to be apprehended by mortal powers. It sees a new heaven and a new earth emerging from the bosom of the old, and teaches us to look, not simply for a perfecting humanity which will perish with the perishing earth, but for an eternal life in an eternal world, a life of thought, and love, and varied but endless service. It affirms that we shall not all die when we die, nor only live on in the influence we leave behind us; but that we ourselves shall still live on, still be men, still the same men although we shall also be new men; and that we shall both witness and share the final triumph of humanity over the imperfections of its nature and its lot.

Whether in its relation to the past, then, or its relation to the present, or its relation to the future, Faith is always the evidence of things not seen, the substance or assurance of things hoped for. It is that quality in us which enables us to look through what *seems* to what *is*, to get behind the transitory shows of time and the ever shifting phenomena of nature, and live in the sacred and abiding realities of which they are only a passing disguise.

In *you*, for instance, Faith sees, not simply a man burdened by many tasks and many cares, going down to business morning by morning, and coming home at night to rest, making money, losing money, enjoying the comforts of home or longing for a more comfortable and luxurious home, racking your brains to win success and reputation or to secure more frequent and ample pleasures ; but a living and immortal soul weaving the robes of character and habit you are to wear for ever, pleasing God or displeasing Him, serving your fellows or injuring them, cultivating the virtues and graces of the spirit or suffering them to fust in you unused. It enables you to see in the world of nature, not simply nor mainly a series of great physical forces at work according to laws which science has discovered and formulated, but the very hand of God Himself, moulding all things according to the eternal counsels of his will, and compelling all things to work together for good.

In fine, if Reason is that eye or faculty of the soul which discerns phenomena, which deals with the shows of things or with the things which do appear, and classifies them and interprets them, and enables us to argue from the phenomenal to the real, from the show to the substance, Faith is that keener and diviner eye which looks through the shows of things, and *sees* the eternal substance that lies behind them, which penetrates the phenomena of sense and time, and discerns the real world, the spiritual and substantial world which casts these transitory shadows before it. For the real world is the spiritual world—the world in which God is, and

good spirits are, and in which we ourselves live when we are at our best ; the world which abides for ever, untouched by the changes and decays of time : and, therefore, the world in which we ourselves shall more truly live when we shall have slipped this mortal coil and time shall be no more.

Here, then, I hope you begin to see why, as we read in the Gospels, our Lord could do no mighty works where men did not believe on Him, why faith is an indispensable condition of miracles. To men without faith, *i.e.*, without an open eye for the invisible and spiritual, a miracle was but one wonder more, a strange phenomenon which excited their surprise. And why should Christ add another phenomenon, another visible and passing show, however strange and wonderful, to the vast series of shows and phenomena which already veiled the unseen spiritual world from them ? How could He do *that* when it was his very office to draw that veil, to take men through and past the shows of life, to reveal the invisible eternal world, and to invite them to enter it and abide in it ? To work miracles *for them* would only have been to keep them *out* of that kingdom of heaven into which He was bent on leading them. But if men believed in Him, and in that substantial and abiding world and home of the spirit which He came to unveil, if they had followed Him, however timidly and humbly, into that world—why, then, a miracle which struck straight up from the visible into the invisible, from the sensuous into the spiritual, was possible to Him because it would be useful to them ; because, instead of thicken-

ing and darkening the veil that hid the real world from them, it would make it thinner, or even compel it for a moment to dispart and let the glory through.

It was no arbitrary fiat, therefore, which made faith a condition of miracles. There was a reason for it, and a good reason. Without faith, men would have seen in a miracle only a phenomenon to marvel at, another wonder to be added to the innumerable wonders of the natural world, not a sign, not a glimpse into the spiritual world which Christ came to reveal. And, hence, He would have been defeating the very end for which He came, had He wrought many mighty works for men who did not believe. Faith was the natural, reasonable, and indispensable condition of miracles such as his.

It is the equally natural, reasonable, and indispensable condition of salvation, of that greater miracle—the spiritual change and transformation by which men are redeemed from their bondage to sense and time, and brought into the kingdom of heaven, the home of the spirit. Faith is always, and by its very nature, a *venture*: but so long as you shrink from the hazards of the venture, you cannot be saved. Faith springs from insight and trust, not from proof. It is reason that demands proof and rests upon it; faith adventures itself without proof, yet not without reason. For, consider. When you hear that God loves you, and would have you love Him; when you hear that you cannot love the Father whom you have not seen unless you love the brother whom you have seen; when you hear that, because He lives you will live also; or that you can be free only as

you obey his law, and rule only as you serve, and gain the best things only by loss of things inferior ; when you hear that He will render unto every man the due recompense of his deeds, and that you ought to live therefore as those who must give account to Him : when, in short, you hear any distinctively Christian or spiritual truth, there is that in you which recognizes its truth and responds to it. You are aware that it is that which is best and highest in you which leaps up to greet it and bear witness to it, to assure you that by grasping these truths you will be laying hold of the most noble and precious realities. But, while that which is spiritual in you moves toward them and incites you to trust in them, flesh and blood bear the other way. These remind you of how much, and how much that is pleasant and dear to them, you will have to give up if you commit yourself to the truth and suffer it to mould your life. Possibly these unspiritual powers suborn reason itself, and turn it against you. Reason whispers : " But where is the proof that these things are true ? Ask for proof ; wait for proof. Do not be in haste. These may be realities ; they may be, as you assume, the supreme and only realities. But they are very mysterious, and even a little questionable. Do not commit yourself to them till you can see them more clearly, and see too how to reconcile them with each other and with the common and received opinions of men." And, as you listen, you pause and stand in doubt.

Now that moment is one of the critical moments in your life, one of the moments in which it has to be

determined whether you will follow the promptings of the Divine Spirit within your soul, which moves you to risk all for duty, for righteousness, for love, for God ; or whether you will at least defer the decision and so make it less likely that you will ever reach it. If you make the venture, if you follow the impulse of that which is deepest and best in you, if you resolve that you will no longer confer with flesh and blood, but yield yourself to the Spirit that stirs and speaks within you, you emerge from the cold atmosphere of doubt in which all miracles, and above all the great miracle of a radical moral change, are impossible, and rise into that native and genial realm of the spirit in which all things become possible, and all that is spiritual in you ripens and unfolds. The eternal truths which you have seen by faith become yours. You are saved from the thralldom of sense and of the sensible world. You pass out beyond the shows of time to find a higher life in the kingdom of righteousness and joy and peace. But if you listen to the voice of sense, to the allurements of the world, to the suggestions of doubt, and resolve, at least for the present, to remain on the low level from which the Spirit of all truth and grace is seeking to lift you, how can you be saved from your bondage to sense and time and doubt? How can you be lifted into the lofty region in which righteousness and charity and peace have their home? How can you please the God who moves and lives and has his being in the spiritual and eternal world which you have once more declined to enter?

“Without faith it is impossible to please Him,” be-

cause without faith it is impossible that his seeking and redeeming Love should take effect upon you ; because, until this gate and avenue of the soul be opened, the main gate and avenue by which He reaches the soul of man is closed against Him. How can you be reconciled to a God in whom you do not believe ? How are you to be made one with Him, how admitted to his fellowship and conformed to his image ? How can you find the true home of your spirit so long as you do not believe its true home to be its true home, or do not so believe it as to risk all that you may possess yourselves of it ?

Salvation is not the being delivered from an outward hell, a hell of outward conditions, whether here or hereafter. It lies, rather, in being drawn away from the outward to the inward, from the material to the spiritual. And if God is not to invade and force your will, you can only rise into this inward and immaterial sphere as you follow the promptings of that which is spiritual in you, and suffer yourselves to be drawn from that which is sensuous and worldly. But if you believe that, at least for the present, your true home, your chief good, your crowning delight, are to be found in that in you which holds by sense, and not in that which is of the spirit, or if you act as though you believed it, how are you to be saved ? how is your higher nature to be emancipated from its bondage to the lower ?

If, then, even as I speak, you are conscious that the better part of your nature goes with what I say, responds to it and confirms it ; if you believe that it is

and will be infinitely better for you to walk after the spirit than to walk after the flesh ; if something within you whispers and persuades you to break with sense and to live for that which is eternal—O, then, the gracious Spirit of God is at this very moment moving across your soul, and seeking at every point to enter in that it may redeem and renew you. Do not resist the pure and gracious Spirit which is striving with you. *Believe* ; believe that what you now see to be true *is* true. Cast yourself upon it. Commit yourself to it. Make the venture of faith. And the great miracle will be wrought upon you ; you will be inwardly changed, changed at the very centre and core of your being. You will please God by letting Him save you unto life everlasting.

XIX.

THE SCOPE OF PRAYER.

“ And this is the boldness which we have toward him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us : and if we know that he heareth us whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions which we have asked of him. If any man see his brother sinning a sin not unto death, he shall ask, and God will give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death : not concerning this do I say that he should make request. All unrighteousness is sin : and there is a sin not unto death.”—I JOHN v. 14-17.

THERE are not many passages in the New Testament which are more difficult and perplexing than this ; nor are there many which men have so often wrested to their own hurt, if not to their own destruction. We all know how men and women of a delicate or aroused conscience have read into it the sentence of their own condemnation : first concluding that they had sinned the sin which is unto death ; and then concluding that from this death there is no possible issue into life everlasting. We must all remember, too, how from this passage the doctors of the Roman Church, guided doubtless by their Rabbinical studies, have drawn that distinction between venial and mortal sins which has

gone far to bring both God and man into bondage to the priest, and to reduce the forgiveness of sins to the level of a commercial transaction—making the very grace of God to depend on priestly intercession, on the one hand ; and, on the other, ranking all the sins of men, from the most trivial to the most fatal, on the scale of an ascending tariff, so that even mortal sins need not prove mortal if only you will bid high enough for absolution.

Even apart from these misrepresentations, which, however, affect our view of it more than we are apt to think, the passage itself is very difficult to interpret aright. For it seems to contradict the very truths on which St. John most commonly and earnestly insists. No one of the Apostles is more sure than he that “the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from *all* sin ;” and yet he here mentions one sin from which it would appear that we cannot be cleansed even by that great sacrifice ! He is the very apostle and champion of love—love to God as proved by love for man ; and yet, here, he not only speaks, or seems to speak, of a sin beyond the reach of the Divine love, but also of a sin which puts the sinner beyond the pale of human love, or at least a sin which banishes our best-loved brother from our prayers.

Now, of course, a passage so difficult in itself, and which the misinterpretations thrust upon it have rendered still more difficult, is not to be explained in a moment. If we are to remove its difficulties we must reach its meaning as a whole ; and we can only reach that meaning as we patiently trace out St. John’s

general course of thought. Happily we can see at a glance that he is here blending two themes, one of which, however, is subordinate to the other. His main thesis is the power of Prayer and its limitations. It is only in a parenthesis, only when he is marking a limit which Prayer cannot pass, that he speaks of the Sin unto Death. And it is quite impossible that we should follow him when he speaks of the sin which is *not* to be prayed for, until we understand what it is that we *are* to pray for, and why he would have us pray for it. To this latter point, then, St. John's general conception of Christian Prayer, let us at once turn our attention, leaving the Sin unto Death for consideration on a future occasion.

Of *Christian* prayer, I said ; for, from Verse 13, it is evident that the Apostle is addressing himself only to those who "believe on the name of the Son of God," *i.e.*, who commit themselves to Him and find in his character the ideal of human life. If we look back to that Verse, we find that he is telling his disciples for what reason, for what end, he has been at the pains of writing to them. He has declared to them what he himself has heard and seen and handled of the Word of Life, in order that they may know that they "have eternal life"—not *hope* that they *may* have it some day in the distant future, but *know* that they now *possess* it. He would have them to be sure that they have already commenced a life over which death has no power, the very same life which they are to live, by and by, in the world in which there shall be no more death. This is

a familiar thought with St. John. The main theme both of his Epistle and of his Gospel is that the eternal life which was in God from the beginning, and in which from the beginning God had intended men to share, has been manifested, shewn forth, in Jesus Christ ; and shewn forth in Him that all men might receive it from Him, that all men might rise to their proper life, the life God intended them for, in and through Him. The *lack* of this eternal life is eternal death ; and the *loss* of this eternal life is eternal death. Men are dead who have never been quickened into it ; and, even after they have been quickened into it, they may die out of it. The sin unto death may cast them, it *tends* to cast them, back into the death from which they have been rescued by the grace of Christ. And because even those who have eternal life may lose it, he wants them both to make sure that they have it, and so to cherish it as that they may never lose it.

How, then, may they cherish and preserve it ? how may they assure themselves that they shall never lose it ? By prayer, replies the Apostle, and by that trust in the pure and saving will of God which prayer implies. " This," he says, " is the confidence we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us." It is not God's will that any should perish. It is his will that all should be saved unto life everlasting. When we pray for life, therefore, whether it be for our own life or for the life of the world, we know that what we ask is in accordance with his will ; and hence we ought to be sure that He hears us, that He will answer us. What-

ever *else* we ask, we ask with a view to life, our own life or that of others; we do not really want Him to give us anything that would injure or impede our highest welfare or that of the world; and therefore, since it is his stedfast and abiding will to give us life, and all that conserves life and contributes to it, we know we have the petitions we have asked of Him.

In short, the true power and blessedness of Prayer lies in the fact that all real prayer is simply asking that God's will may be done, which will is sure to be done. Whatever the form our prayer may take, *this* is at bottom what we mean, and ask, and cannot fail to get. So that nothing lies beyond the reach of prayer except that which lies outside the pure, kind, and saving will of God. What we hold to be contrary to that high Will, for that we are not to pray: and hence St. John will not advise us to ask for life for those who have sinned unto death; but whatever is within the scope and compass of that gracious and almighty Will, for this we are not only to pray, but to pray with boldness, with the full assurance that we shall get whatsoever we ask of Him.

This is St. John's general conception of the function and scope of Prayer. It is not, perhaps, the only conception of Prayer contained in the New Testament; but surely it is the highest and noblest ever revealed to man. For, mark, how much it involves, how many of the difficulties by which we are beset it removes out of our way.

I. The revelation of St. John would have been of infinite worth to us had it done nothing more than teach us that there is a *Will* behind and over the universe, and

that this Will is good, bent on our life, set on our salvation. Whatever their beliefs or disbeliefs, men must pray. As pure matter of historic fact they always have prayed, even when to pray was but to throw out ejaculations, charged with profound emotion, into an infinite darkness. They are praying at this very hour, even though they have no God, or no God worthy of the name, to whom to address their appeal. All the world, for example, might have heard Professor Beesly, an advanced theist, praying at the corner of the streets, *i.e.*, in the pages of *The Contemporary Review* (March, 1881), and even "devoutly praying," that Mr. Gladstone might have grace to bring in a good Land Bill ; and some of us were a little curious to know to whom that prayer was offered. Mr. Frederick Harrison, again, who has no god but "Humanity," an abstraction which cannot possibly answer his petitions, is constantly advocating the organization of worship, and exhorting us not to give up prayer, even though we have given up God. And George Eliot, in writing to her friends, prays "God bless you," before she is aware, and then tries to persuade herself that the benediction has some devout meaning in it, though there be no God to bless them. Men are driven to prayer by the burden and pressure of life, by their need of a help higher than their own. Even if we have no Divine standard of conduct, and no known God to whom we can appeal, we feel that things are not as they ought to be with us or in the world at large ; and we pray because we secretly believe or faintly hope that, somewhere in the universe, there must be a Power which

can set them right. We may have "very dim and confused notions of what that Power may be, or why things should have gone into disorder in spite of it ;" we may even doubt at times "whether it is not itself the author of our misery." Nevertheless we pray ; we cry out against the evils that are in the world, and that are rending our own hearts, even though we know not to whom our appeal is made, or whether there will be any response to our cry. So great is the confusion amid which we stand that at times it seems to us as if "a number of different Minds and Wills must be ruling the universe and tearing it in pieces. Which of these Wills or Powers are in our favour, and which of them are adverse to us, we cannot tell ;" and if we are without the revelation made to St. John, or without faith in it, our deep inward sense of guilt commonly leads us to the conclusion that all are adverse to us, and that the only question is how we may propitiate or evade them.

But if we accept that revelation, all becomes clear to us at once and for ever. For we learn from it that the Son of God came into the world to reveal its true order, to manifest the Divine Will which lies and works behind all the darkness and confusion of the world, and to prove that that Will is good, a Will which is leading men through darkness to light, a Will which is set on saving men unto life everlasting. *He* found the world, as we find it, full of darkness, strife, misery. But He would not for a moment admit that this misery, strife, and darkness were the work, or expressed the will, of his and our Father in heaven. Instead of submitting

to them, instead of advising us to submit to them, as to an inevitable fate, however intolerable, He fought against them every moment of his life, fought against and overcame them. And He invites us to share both the conflict and the conquest. He nerves us for the conflict and assures us of the conquest by declaring it to be the purpose of the unseen Will by which the universe is ruled that evil should be overcome of good, that a divine order and beauty should be established in every heart and throughout the world. And if we believe on the Son of God, if we know that we have the eternal life which He came to communicate, how can we refuse to take part in his conflict with evil, disorder, confusion? How can we doubt that our efforts and prayers for the redemption of the world will be crowned with success? We are asking a thing according to his will, the will He has made known to us; "and this is the confidence we have in Him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, He heareth us."

2. It is but a corollary from this argument, though it is one which lifts a heavy burden from our hearts, to say that in this revelation to St. John we have an answer to the question, Why does God permit evil to exist? an answer which, while it does not solve or does not exhaust that mystery, does so blunt its edges that it no longer has power to wound us. For, according to St. John, man was made in the image of God, made to find his rest in God, and yet made free to seek his own rest, choose his own ends, take his own path. Till his will becomes one with the Will that rules the universe,

he can only be restless and miserable, because at odds with his own proper blessedness, because he is at strife with a Will he can never overcome, a Will which it would simply be ruin and perdition for him to overcome, were it possible. And yet the will of man is not to be *coerced* into the harmony in which alone it can truly rest. No power but love can draw it into harmony with the Divine Will. And hence the wonderful and gracious moment of the revelation of the love of God in Christ Jesus his Son. The only power which can possibly draw our wills into that accord with the Ruling Will in which alone we can truly rest *is at work* upon us and upon all men, seeking to draw us to our rest in Him. So that all that now remains to us is to ask with boldness, and with confidence, that our own wills, and that all wills which are struggling against the will of God and their own proper good, may be reduced to obedience. In asking this, we are clearly asking that God's will may be done on earth; for this was the very end for which He made men and for which He redeemed them. And, if we ask anything that accords with his will, we know that He heareth us, and that we shall have what we ask.

Practically, we need nothing more than this. It is enough for us to know that the evils from which we suffer are of our own making, not of God's making; that He could not but permit them unless He were to crush or supersede our wills; and that in his love He is ever seeking to save us from them by inducing us to say from the heart: "Our wills are ours, we *do* know why; our wills are ours, that we may make them Thine; and

all the ills of life are designed to draw us to our rest in Thee."

3. But there is still another difficulty—perhaps the commonest of all—which this passage suggests, while it also suggests a reply to it. It may be said, it often has been said: "If it lends new force and happiness to prayer to know that we are only asking what God means to bestow, yet, on the other hand, why need we ask Him to do what He is bent on doing without any will of ours? Why should we not let his pure and kindly will take effect without troubling Him with our requests?"

The objection is so natural, and takes so many forms, that, even though we have answered it a thousand times, it is for ever starting up in our hearts as strong as ever, and is almost ready to deny that it has ever been answered at all. And yet the main drift of our answer is plain and clear enough. For, of course, the direct alternative to asking for the things which accord with God's will is to ask things which do *not* accord with it. None of us are prepared to do that, I suppose, or can doubt for a moment that, if we could get anything contrary to God's will, it would simply undo us.¹

But the indirect alternative—*not asking anything*—is more attractive to us in certain faithless, indolent, or

¹ While still a child I was profoundly impressed by hearing a celebrated musician, who was much addicted to urging the sceptical objections to Religion, say in answer to the blunt charge, "You don't believe in the providence of God, then!" "Not believe in Divine Providence, sir? Why, I believe if *that fly* could settle on any spot a single point from that ordained for it by the will of God, the whole universe would rush into instant ruin."

despondent moods. But have you considered what that means? Do you quite comprehend, or quite remember, what is involved in keeping two wills in accord? Can I keep my will in accord with yours simply by not willing anything opposed to your will? No, if my will is to be in true accord, in vital harmony with yours, I must will what you will, seek what you seek. I must ask you what your best and highest will is, and urge you to do it: I must make it my will, and stir myself up to do it. And if our rest in God is our only real rest, if we reach and maintain this rest only as we will what He wills, must we not ask Him what his will is, and stir up ourselves to take hold of it? But his will is that we and all men should be saved unto life everlasting. He has manifested that life in order that we may share it. And how can we be saved from the evil, cruel, and selfish desires which rise within us, and war against our life and peace, save by his help? How can we help to save the world, *i.e.*, the men about us, except as we derive our strength from Him? It is part of his declared will that we *should* ask his help; that we should seek strength for his service from Him. And how shall we will what He wills unless we do what He commands us, unless we ask his help both in our personal strife with sin and in our strife with the sin that is in the world?

Yes, God's will *will* be done, with our help or without it. But if we love Him and trust in Him, can we be wholly without ambition to share in his great work of salvation and in the ultimate triumph of his love? We sometimes feel as if there were hardly any value in the

prayer which only asks that God would do what He has determined to do, and give what He has determined to give. But if the great purpose and determination of God be to give eternal life to us and to all men, by drawing our wills into living harmony with his will, must we not desire to have what He desires to bestow, must we not labour to take what He is ever seeking to give? Is it nothing, is it not everything to us, that we may draw near to Him and ask Him to call away our wandering affections from the things which would injure and debase us, and to fix them on the things which will quicken, purify, and ennoble us? Is it nothing, is it not everything to us, that we may ask Him for grace so to order our lives by his will, and so to shew forth the power of his love, that our neighbours may be constrained to believe in that love and to turn to Him for life? To us, who cannot do even the thing we would, and cannot give life even to those whom we love best, is it not the greatest blessedness that we may ask God to give them life, ask Him for strength to do his will, and know that we shall have the petitions which we have asked of Him?

4. For all these reasons, then, and for many more, we ought to ask that God's will may be done, ought to ask *Him* to do his will in us and in our fellows. But, finally, we ought to ask for nothing more than this, for nothing inconsistent with this. He stands pledged to hear and to help us when we ask for eternal life, whether for ourselves or for our neighbours; but, beyond this, his pledge, as understood and reported by St. John at least,

does not go. All else we are called to leave with Him—called not only by his Word, but also by our own experience. For as we look back, can we not see how often, but for his grace, we should have fallen into

The secret ambush of a specious prayer?

Can we not remember how we have asked and *not* been heard—asked for work, for instance, when we were poor and destitute; asked for health when we were sick; asked for means to do more, as we thought, for Him; asked that we might not be openly punished for secret sins, lest we should be disgraced in our own eyes and in the eyes of our fellows; asked with passionate earnestness, with piercing importunity, with hearts sick with fear, with desire, with despair even, and yet have been refused? And cannot you and I both see now that often these very refusals were most gracious answers; that what we sought, what at the time we believed would have been so good for us, would not have been good at all, would have set us on wrong courses, would have prevented us from finding better openings and courses that came to us afterward, or would have thrown us back in the spiritual life rather than have helped us forward in it?

If that is so—and I cannot doubt that with you, as with me, it has been so—ought it not to be enough for us to know that all things on earth are being shaped and ordered by a Divine Will, that that Will is purely and only good, and that it is set and bent on doing us good? Ought we not to shrink from asking anything of

God but that his will may be done in us and in all men? Or if we venture to ask for anything else, anything more, ought not our prayer to be accompanied with the sincerest confession of our own ignorance of what will be good for us, and the most earnest desire that God would revise our petitions, and grant us only what He sees it will be good for us to have, only what will really promote our life in Him? Ought not *this* to be our confidence, our strength, our hope, as we look into the confusion and misery of our own hearts and lives, and even as we look into the confusions and miseries of the great dark world around us, that the good pure Will of God is stedfastly working on to its declared end; working, in ways that we know not and cannot fathom, for and toward our salvation and the salvation of the race? Have we any other real hope than this within our reach? Could we have any better, brighter, or more sustaining hope?

Let this be our confidence, then, when the world seems going back or losing ground, or when we are oppressed with a sense of our own faults, frailties, failures, that the Will of God is that both we and all men should have eternal life; and that as often as we ask Him to do this will, He heareth us. For

He always wins who sides with God,
To him no chance is lost;
God's will is sweetest to him when
It triumphs at his cost.
Ill that He blesses is our good,
And unblest good is ill;
And all is right that seems most wrong
If it be his pure will.

XX.

*THE SIN UNTO DEATH.*¹

“If any man see his brother sinning a sin not unto death, he shall ask, and God will give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death : not concerning this do I say that he should make request.”—I JOHN v. 16.

THERE are not many Verses in the New Testament which have so sad a history as this ; and one is often tempted to think that if the Apostle of Love could have foreseen the terrible effects it has produced on the delicate and alarmed consciences of the very men and women to whom it least applies, he would never have written it. Which of us, alas, has not met some pious but sensitive and haggard soul driven to the verge, or over the verge, of madness by the dreadful conviction that he or she had sinned the sin which is unto death, and by the fear that from this death there was no possible issue unto life everlasting ?²

¹ I reprint this paper from *The Expositor* (Vol. I. *Second Series*) with some slight excisions, alterations, and additions, in order to complete the series of four Discourses on some of the ruling ideas of St. John. It is the only reprint in the Volume.

² In my first charge, when I was young and inexperienced, the very first grave task set me was to carry what comfort I could to

Quite apart, however, from the sinister and unfounded suggestions which it has carried into many devout minds, the Verse is full of difficulty. Two difficulties are suggested by it at which the Church has always marvelled and been perplexed ; and two marvels are affirmed in it of which perhaps the most marvellous feature is that the Church has never expressed any astonishment at them, although, as I judge, *these* are its real difficulties rather than those which she has selected for special wonder.

The two recognized difficulties of the Verse are (1) the sin unto death, of which the Church is still asking, What is it ? conscious, apparently, that the question has never yet been answered to her satisfaction ; and (2) that for this sin—so at least the Church has assumed—St. John forbids us to pray, as though it were beyond the reach of forgiveness, as if there were at least one sin for which “the blood of Christ, which cleanseth from all sin,” could not atone.

The two unrecognized difficulties or wonders are (1) that the Apostle declares every departure from the

my predecessor's widow, a singularly devout and devoted woman, who, in the depths of her grief, had come to the conclusion that she had committed this fatal sin, or “God would never have been so hard with her.” No reasonings, no prayers—for of course I soon called to my aid far abler and better men than myself—had the slightest effect upon her, or seemed so much as to touch the fixed idea she had taken to her heart. With an almost incredible ingenuity, she turned all grounds for hope into food for her despair. And in a few weeks she passed from my care into an asylum, only to be carried from the asylum to her grave. For years afterwards I shrank from this text as if it had been guilty of murder. Such experiences bite deep.

Divine Will to be a separation from the Divine Life, although it is not necessarily a sin unto death ; and (2) assures us that, in every case but one, if we ask life for those who have thus separated themselves from life, God will "give us life for them." And *these* seem to me very much more difficult than *those*.

Now, of course, our only hope of apprehending a Verse so difficult in itself, and which the misinterpretations thrust upon it have rendered still more difficult, lies, as I said in my last Discourse, in a patient study both of the Verse itself and of its connections (say from Verses 9-18 of this Chapter), in the light of St. John's habitual modes of thought and expression. Happily the Verse itself sets us on a good track for our study, since, from its very structure it is evident that St. John is here blending two themes, one of which is subordinate to the other. His main theme is the scope and power of Prayer. But the scope of Prayer suggests its limitations ; and it is only as he is marking a limit which prayer cannot pass that he speaks of the sin unto death. If, therefore, we would apprehend what he has to say on Sin, we must first consider what he has to say on Prayer. We can hardly hope to follow him when he speaks of the sin which is *not* to be prayed for, or for which he will not advise us to pray, until we understand what it is we *are* to pray for, and why we are to pray for it.

1. We take first, then, the recognized difficulty about *Prayer*. And if we look at all carefully at the Verse, it is at once clear to us that the difficulty is purely of

our own making. For, despite the assumption of the Church, St. John does not *forbid* us to pray for the forgiveness of any sin. All he does, as the Revised Version shews more clearly than the Authorized, is to decline advising that we should pray for the forgiveness of a sin which he specifies, if we happen to believe that sin to be beyond the scope of the Divine forgiveness. "There is a sin unto death ; *I do not say that he shall pray for that ;*" or, more literally, "*not concerning that am I now saying that he shall pray.*" At some other time he may, or may not, enjoin us to pray even for this sin ; but, for the present at least, he does not enjoin us : and that surely is very far from *forbidding* us to pray for it. How far his words are from a prohibition we shall understand the moment we reflect what we ourselves mean, and wish to convey, when we say to a child, "I do not *bid*, I do not *command* you to do this or that." We may mean, "I heartily wish you would do it without being told ;" we cannot mean less than, "I leave it open to you, you are quite free to do it or not, as you will." And St. John did not mean less than this. He neither enjoins nor forbids his disciples to pray for a brother who had sinned a sin unto death. He expressly declines to do either ; that is, he left them free to decide for themselves whether they would pray for him or would not.

And if they were his disciples indeed, they would determine this open question by the general principles, the theory of Christian Prayer, which he had just laid down. He has declared to them what he himself had

heard and seen and handled of the Word of Life, he says in Verse 13, in order that they may "*know* that they have eternal life," the life which was with God from the beginning, and in which from the beginning God had intended men to share. This life was manifested in Christ that men might receive it from Him. The *want* of this life is eternal death; and the *loss* of it is eternal death: the "sin unto death" will cast them back into the death from which they have been delivered. And they can only so cherish it as never to lose it by habitual prayer, and by that trust in the pure, kind, saving will of God which prayer implies. "This," he says, "is the confidence we have in Him that, if we ask anything according to his will, He heareth us. Life *is*, as He has Himself taught us, in accordance with his will. When we pray for life, therefore, whether it be our own life or the life of our fellows, we ought to be sure that we shall have the petitions we have asked of Him."

In short, the true power, the true blessedness, of Prayer lies in the fact that, as all real prayer is simply an asking that God's will may be done in us and in our neighbours, we may be sure that He will give us what we ask of Him. And, of course, it is part, it is the negative aspect, of this blessedness that if we ask anything *not* in accordance with his will, anything adverse to "life," He will not give us what we ask, though He may still listen to what we say, and be no more offended with us than we with children who ask for that which *we* know, though they do not, it will not be good for them to have.

Now some of St. John's disciples may have believed that when a man had sinned a certain kind of sin, the sin unto death, it was contrary to God's will that he should ever be quickened into life again. They may have held that, in that sin, his spiritual life came to an end, just as our natural life seems to come to an end, though it does not really come to an end, when we die. And the Apostle does not pause to argue with them, or seek to enlarge their conception of "life," their sense of the scope of the Divine mercy. He does not even tell them that, in his own apprehension of it, the scope of that Mercy was far wider than in theirs; nor does he now remind them that, in itself, the Divine mercy must be of far wider scope than even he was able to conceive, though that was true too, and he must have known it to be true. All this was beside his present purpose. What he is now concerned for is that they should feel how blessed a thing it is that there is a good, pure, redeeming Will at work behind all the changes and mysteries of human life; that this Will has been manifested as the light and life of men in the man Christ Jesus; and that therefore they might ask for "life," and be sure of getting it, since they were asking for a thing "according to his will." He leaves them to determine for themselves what the Divine Will which saves men is, and how far it extends; all he demands of them is that they will not ask for anything which they hold to be opposed to that Will.

2. And so we reach our second difficulty, the recognized difficulty about *Sin*. For while some of St. John's

disciples may have held that "the sin unto death" was beyond the reach of forgiveness, and was not therefore to be prayed for, others of them may have believed that there was no limit to the Divine forgiveness; they may have held that "the blood of Christ cleanseth from *all* sin," even from the sin unto death. But neither with them does St. John stay to argue and explain. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. But let them all be sure of this: that whatever they asked which was according to the will of God would be granted them; and let them all be earnest in the endeavour to ascertain what that Will was and to adopt it. At the same time he admits, *par parenthesis*, that there is a sin unto death, and will neither advise any man to pray for it or forbid him to pray for it. He only mentions this sin in passing indeed; and therefore we must not expect him to explain it. Whatever it was, or was held to be (and I have sometimes thought this sin *unto* death, *i.e.*, the sin which *tends* to death, may have then been held to be that of renouncing Christ rather than accept a martyr's fate), it was evidently quite familiar to him and to those for whom he wrote. It presented no difficulty to them, though it presents so great a difficulty to us. It fell naturally into its place in their ethical system, though we, not knowing what it is, know not where to place it.

Obviously our only hope of framing a reasonable, an admissible and helpful, conception of it lies in our acquaintance with the leading thoughts and convictions of St. John, which were also those of the men to whom

he wrote, and who understood him so well that he did not need to explain his meaning to them. And, perhaps, if we seek to recover his leading thoughts, or even the leading thoughts of this Epistle, we may arrive at a conception of this sin unto death which will at least lessen the perplexity and distress it has occasioned us.

These thoughts are summarized, sufficiently for our purpose, in Verses 11-18 of this Chapter. "This is the record" which St. John felt himself specially called to bear, "that God hath given us eternal life, and that this life is in his Son." In other words, he held and taught that the very life of God, *eternal life*, was manifested to men in Christ Jesus, and was manifested in Him that they might lay hold upon it and share it. If they believed in Him, they became of one heart, one nature, one spirit with Him. The "life" that was in Him passed into them. In St. John's peculiar idiom, "they *had* the Son," and therefore "they *had life*," the only life worthy of the name. But if he who had the Son had life, "he that had not the Son of God had not the life" of God. He was dead to God, dead in sin. In St. John's view, the proper life of man is life in God, the life manifested in Christ Jesus, and imparted by Christ Jesus to as many as believe on Him. All who had not this life were dead. All who lost it died. Any act which separated a man from Christ, which cut him off from the communion of life in Christ, was "a sin unto death:" for how should a man lose life, and yet not die? Like his brother apostles, St. John held that it was possible for a man, even after he had been quickened

into life and called into the fellowship of Christ, to fall away from it, to deny and renounce "the Life indeed," to apostatize from Him, to sink back into the death from which he had been delivered. How could they doubt it when one of themselves, Judas Iscariot, had thus fallen away from Christ, lapsed from the life of fellowship with Him into the death of separation from Him? ¹

"There is a sin unto death," then. But it does not inevitably follow that the communion thus broken can never be renewed. While I feel the full force of Canon Westcott's note on this Verse, "St. John speaks of the sin as 'tending to death' (*πρὸς θάνατον*), and not as necessarily involving death: death is, so to speak, its natural consequence, if it continue, and not its inevitable issue as a matter of fact," I lay no grave stress on it here. I take the case at its worst, when the tendency is fully developed, when its natural consequence has become its actual issue: and even then I cannot admit that those who have fallen from life into death can never be delivered from the death into which they have fallen. St. John does not affirm it: why should we? So long as a man exists repentance may be possible, and therefore life may be possible. "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin," even from sins against Himself, and against the life we have in Him.² In some cases, no doubt, men pass out of the world impenitent, and therefore unrenewed. And it may be that they can only be redeemed from death by the ministries

¹ Hebrews vi. 1-8; x. 26-31.

² 1 John i. 7-9.

of death itself, only taught to hate and renounce their sins by being delivered into the hands of their sins. We who trust "the larger hope" do not altogether lose hope even for them, though we sigh and tremble as we think of the miseries they must inevitably endure before they can come to have any hope for themselves.

The sin unto death, if persisted in, must involve all the horrors of death, here or hereafter. But it is not inevitable that these horrors should be postponed to a future state. Even those who can cherish no hope for the impenitent who die in their sins need not add to their burden the sorrowful conviction that all who sin the sin *unto* death perish everlastingly. The tendency of the sin is toward death, but that tendency may be arrested. *Here*, at least, the gulf between life and death is not impassable. It has been crossed. "That wicked person" at Corinth, for example, whom St. Paul bade his brethren solemnly excommunicate from the Church, as one who had adjudged himself unworthy of eternal life, had manifestly sinned a sin unto death. He had cut himself off from life in Christ, and was to be cast out "as one dead." By his own act he had proved himself to be no longer a member of the body of Christ, because no longer animated by his Spirit. And he is formally handed over to Satan "for destruction." But it is for the destruction "of the flesh" and of the fleshly mind. And the flesh is to be destroyed only "*that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.*"¹ That happy day soon came. For, within a few months, St.

¹ 1 Corinthians v. 1-5.

Paul declares that the punishment of this wicked person is "sufficient;" that he is in danger of being swallowed up and swept away by the swelling waters of the very sorrow which has wrought life in him; and that, as he has once more found life in Christ, he is at once to be restored to the fellowship of Christ.¹

The sin unto death, therefore, I judge to be, even when it is fully developed, any sin which so separates us from the life of Christ that, before we can be restored to it, we must pass through the pangs and terrors of death, must be compelled to feel that we have lost *Him*, and in losing Him have lost our life; that we have placed obstacles in the way which make it impossible for us to reach Him, and very hard for Him to reach us. If this terrible conviction should breed godly sorrow in us, we may hope that Christ will break through every obstacle, that He will forgive us and comfort us even in this world. But if it breed in us only a proud and selfwilled remorse, or, worse still, if it should leave us hard and cold and insensible to the guilt of our sin, we shall then have condemned ourselves to the horrors of "the second death," and, if saved at all, can only be "saved so as by fire."

On the whole, then—though I would be understood to speak on this mystery with the modesty and reserve which it demands, and am very far from supposing that I have reached a final solution of it—I think we may safely assume that the sin unto death is not so much some single, mysterious, and enormous act of wickedness

¹ 2 Corinthians ii. 6-11.

taken by itself, as a state or tendency of the soul, a state of separation from the life of God, which is the proper life of man, a state into which even those who have been quickened and redeemed may sink, and which is likely to reveal itself in their general bent and course of conduct, though it *may* come to a head in some decisive act which the Church cannot overlook. I think, too, we may be sure that those who are overwhelmed with grief and shame at the mere suspicion of having fallen into this sin are precisely those who cannot possibly have committed it; or that, at worst, they are precisely those who, like the wicked person of Corinth, are being cleansed from it. Their sorrow, like his, is a sign of life, an omen of life everlasting.

3. But, besides the recognized difficulty, this Verse contains an *unrecognized* difficulty about *Prayer*. And did we not dread God more than we love Him, and care more to pry into the darkness than to walk in the light, I really do not see how it has come to pass that the threatening of this Verse has made so deep an impression upon us, while, so far as I can discover, its promise has made no impression at all.

Ever since St. John wrote his Epistle all the Church, if not all the world, has been anxious to know what the sin unto death is: but who has pondered and wrestled with *the prayer unto life*? Who has studied and acted on the wonderful and gracious words, "If any man see his brother sin a sin not unto death, *he shall ask, and God will give him life for them that sin not unto death?*" Nay, which of us has so much as marked that there

was any wonder in these most wonderful words, or any rebuke in them, or any encouragement? And yet what astonishing words they are! how pregnant both with encouragement and with rebuke!

When *we* see our brother sin, we are commonly stirred up to suspect, to censure, to dislike him: but which of us is stirred up to pray for him? And even if we do pray for him, pray that he may be taught to see and feel and confess his sins, or even pray that his sins may be forgiven him, yet which of us is bold enough to ask that he may have "life," a life so full, so pure, so potent that it will conquer and purge away all his sins; and to believe that, in answer to our prayer, God will give him life, or, in St. John's still more emphatic idiom, give *us* life *for him*?

This, surely, is the true wonder of the passage, that it should hold so great a promise, and that, nevertheless, we should have overlooked it; that God should have put so gracious and singular a power into our hands, and that we should have made so little use of it, or even no use of it!

When we see our brother sin a sin of conceit, or of self-will, or of ill-temper, or any one of the thousand sins which we admit to be not unto death, because, though inconsistent with the life of Christ, they do not wholly separate him from it, we are hurt and offended; we hope that he will know better and do better some day: and even to reach this point is held to be a stretch of Christian charity. But such poor charity as this leaves us far below the mark at which St. John would have us aim.

According to him, the first and natural effect produced on us by the faults and sins we find it so hard not to resent, should be to drive us to prayer—prayer, not for ourselves, but for our offending brother. He would have us ask that the life of Christ may so grow and unfold itself within him as to deliver him from his faults and sins. But which of us does that? Which of us believes even that it is in our power to get life, more life and fuller, for him?

Yet St. John assures us that it *is* in our power. If we ask life for the brother who has trespassed against us, God, says the Apostle, will give him life, nay, give us life for him! Astonishing as the promise is, how could St. John but hold it to be true? It was but a plain inference from the principles on which we have heard him insist. This eternal life has been manifested to men that they may have it. It is God's will and intention that they should have it. Plainly, therefore, in asking life for an offending brother, we are asking "according to his will." "And this is the confidence we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us."

Wonderful as the promise is, then, it is a fair and simple deduction from the first principles of the gospel, at least of the gospel according to St. John. And one thing is quite certain, *viz.*, that, if we believed it and acted on it, it would give a strange vitality to that Christian "fellowship" on which the Apostle lays so much stress, though in our hands it is in no small danger of degenerating into a pretentious unreality. For

if when we saw any member of the Christian community sin, instead of breaking out into censures and rebukes, or cherishing toward him a silent ill-will and suspicion, we all with one consent began to pray for him, to ask life for him: and if in our whole manner to him we shewed that we believed God to have heard and answered our prayer, our fellowship with him in Christ would become a vigorous and sustaining reality both to him and to us. How could we but feel that "he had fellowship with us, and that our fellowship was with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ?"

This, indeed, might be one of the chief ways in which the promise would be fulfilled. For if the brother who had sinned, and was haunted by the consciousness of his sin, felt that the whole Christian community was praying for him, if he saw them behaving as if they knew they were answered, knew that God had given him life and expected to see him use it, might he not be constrained "to match the promise in their eyes," to meet their expectation, to respond to their love, to renounce and abandon his sin, and to rise into the very "life" they had asked for him?

The answer to prayer, the fulfilment of the gracious promise, would not, of course, be immediate and direct in every case. In some cases, no doubt, that answer would come through the very punishments which chastised the sin and quickened a longing for deliverance. But life, eternal life, is worth waiting for, worth suffering for. *No* answer to prayer is, in every case, immediate and direct. And if we believe it to be God's

will that none should perish, but that all should come to life everlasting, how can we doubt that when we ask God for life, sooner or later, directly or indirectly, "we shall have the petition we have desired of him"?

4. Another unrecognized difficulty of this Verse is that the Apostle declares every departure from the Divine Will to be a separation from the Divine Life, and yet admits that many of the sins which sever us from life are, nevertheless, not sins unto death. He bids us ask for life—as though life had been lost—for the very man whose sins he admits not to be fatal: and yet how should a man lose life and not die?

The difficulty meets us again in Verses 17 and 18, while here it is complicated by one of St. John's habitual idioms, and rendered still more difficult. "All unrighteousness is sin;" "whosoever is born of God doth not sin;" and yet "there is a sin not unto death." Taken together, these three phrases imply that every wrong or unrighteous act separates us from the life of God—for "he that is born of God doth not sin;" and yet that every such separation from eternal life does not involve eternal death.

Now it would be easy to evade this difficulty, while seeming to remove it, by saying: Just as there are many things which injure our physical life, which lower its power and lessen its scope, but which nevertheless are not fatal to it, so also, if there are some wounds which are fatal to our spiritual life, there are others from which it may and does recover. That, so far as it goes, is quite true; but it does not really explain St.

John's peculiar terminology, nor does it meet the difficulty which his terminology suggests frankly and fully. He says, "whosoever is born of God sinneth not;" and the phrase is not an exceptional, or even a rare, one in his writings. It recurs again and again, especially in Chapter iii. of this Epistle, and takes even such a positive and absolute form as this: "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for *his* seed remaineth in him; and he *cannot* sin, because he is born of God." Yet, in the Verse before us, he speaks of those who have been born of God as sinning sins not unto death, and even as sinning sins which are unto death. But how should those sin who "cannot" sin?

The simple fact is that St. John, like St. Paul, held that in every one of us there are two natures, two selves, two men, striving together for the mastery; the one born of God and walking after the spirit, the other coming of evil and walking after the flesh. St. Paul¹ called them the inward man and the outward man, and, again, the spiritual man and the carnal man, and spoke of them as fulfilling "the law of the mind" and "the law in the members." St. John distinguished between that in us which is, and that which is not, born of God; between that which walketh in the light and that which walketh in the darkness. Even we ourselves speak of the true self in us and the false self, or of the better nature and the worse, or of the ideal man and the actual man. The fact which underlies all these various terminologies is one and the same: *vis.*, that as there is

¹ Romans vii.

that in us which loves evil and does it, so also there is that in us which loves good, and clings to it even when it cannot do it. Even when we are at our worst, when we suffer the lower or baser self to rule in us, and do that which we know to be wrong, we are conscious of "a will to do good," conscious at least of a something in us which protests against the evil while we do it, and mourns over it when it is done, which will never consent to it or take part in it. And this we call our true self, our best self—*this* that will bear no part nor lot in any sin we commit. St. John and St. Paul word our conception in a different way, indeed ; but all that they add to it is (1) the affirmation that, when this inward and better self, or man, has been impregnated with the life of God, when it has laid hold of that eternal life which was manifested in Christ Jesus, it becomes capable of subduing, absorbing, transforming the lower nature which wars against it ; and (2) the warning that, even when this eternal life has been quickened within us, unless we cherish it, and walk by it, we may lose it, may grow cold, hard, indifferent, may even suffer the lower nature to conquer the higher and hold it in bondage, if not utterly and for ever to destroy it by subduing it to its own base quality or likeness.

Whatever contradiction, or apparent contradiction, there may be in the terms they employ, therefore, or whatever allowance we may be disposed to make for the terms and idioms of their age, the fact which they set forth is quite familiar to us ; it constitutes the very secret and mystery of our complex moral nature. We

feel in ourselves the very strife which they describe ; we recognize the victory they promise us, if we are true to the better self and to God, in them themselves, and in thousands of our neighbours who share their spirit and are treading in their steps ; and we see the terrible defeat against which they warn us, not only in Iscariot, in Demas, and in the excommunicated sinner of Corinth, but also in many of our fellows who did once walk well and stoutly in the ways of Christ, but have now fallen away from their life in Him. Even in those who have won the victory, and won it most conspicuously, while we recognize a nature or self which never gave consent to sin, we recognize also a nature which only too effectually moved them to do the thing they would not, so that even a Paul bemoaned himself as the very chief of sinners, and even a John, long after he was "born of God," could write, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

And it is in these experiences of our own, and of those who were in Christ before us, that we find our best explanation of the sins which *are* unto death, and of the sins which are *not* unto death, and come to understand how an inspired Apostle could affirm that that in us which is born of God cannot sin, and yet in the same breath confess, "If we say we have not sinned, we make God a liar." The better self, the better man in us—*this* is that which cannot sin, because it is born and quickened of God ; the worse or lower self, the outward man of the flesh—*this* is that in us which commits sin, because as yet it is not redeemed from vanity and cor-

ruption, "so that the good we would we do not, and the evil which we would not, that we do." So long as this better self is gaining on, so long even as it is striving against, the lower unregenerate self, our sins are not sins unto death : but so soon as we cease from the strife with evil, and suffer the lower self to usurp an undisputed authority over us, we sin the sins which are unto death ; we are no longer trying to obey the law of the mind ; even the will to do good is no longer present with us.

XXI.

CHILD OF THE DEVIL OR CHILD OF GOD ?

“ He that committeth sin is of the devil ; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. . . . Whosoever is begotten of God doth not commit sin, because his seed abideth in him ; and he cannot sin, because he is begotten of God.—I JOHN iii. 8, 9.

IN my last Discourse I spoke of the two wills, two selves, two men, of which St. John, like St. Paul, was conscious in his single being or personality. Both these great Apostles recognized in themselves that opposition of nature, that double moral consciousness, of which we are all more or less clearly aware ; both were torn by that strife between good and evil which goes on within us : and both knew that this inward strife could only issue in victory as the better self in them, the spiritual man, was reinforced by a Divine power and grace. In the Verses before us this double consciousness, this opposition of nature, is set forth in the most absolute, extreme, and instructive form, yet in a form so paradoxical, so alien to the set of modern thought, that at times we are tempted to wish it had been thrown into other words..

The wish is as foolish as it is vain. For must not the Bible be consistent with itself? Should we, can we, expect to find in it *unbiblical* forms of thought and speech? And who can deny that in the words, "He that committeth sin is of the devil, for the devil sinneth from the beginning," we have, in one of the last scriptures of the New Testament an echo from the first book of the Old Testament, an abstract and brief commentary on that story of the Fall of Man which stands recorded in the opening pages of Genesis?

Instead of wishing that St. John had stated the Biblical conception of human nature in a form less harsh to the ears of modern science, let us, rather, study the form in which he has stated it, with the firm conviction that we have much to learn from it, much that is true, much, therefore, which cannot contradict any other truth, whatever the channel by which it may have reached us.

If we look at the context, then, we see that the Apostle has been teaching his readers "what would make them righteous;" *viz.*, such a fellowship with the righteous Lord of men as would compel them to do that which is right. By a logical process of thought he proceeds, in Verse 8, to teach them what would make them unrighteous; *viz.*, fellowship with an unrighteous spirit who was for ever aiming at an usurped lordship over them. Two lords were claiming them; to the one of whom they were drawn by the better self, by the spiritual man, in them; to the other of whom they were drawn by the lower self, by the carnal man:

and their moral state, their ethical standing, depended on the choice they made, on the influence or authority to which they yielded. The service of the righteous Spirit, their rightful Lord, would make them righteous; while the service of the unrighteous spirit, the wrongful usurper, would make them unrighteous.

Thus stated, stated in these general terms, there are comparatively few perhaps who, if they were allowed to refine a little on the terms employed, would object to the Apostle's thought. But to his own blunt statement of it, "He that sinneth is *of the devil*," they instantly and urgently, if not scornfully, object. They say: "To attribute the sins of men to the devil is fatal to morality. It is to release men from the responsibility of their own acts, to provide them with a stalking-horse on which they may fling the burden, the onus, of their transgressions." Or they say: "All that conception of an evil spirit, who slanders God to man and accuses man to God, is a mere Jewish superstition, or, at best, a merely dramatic form of speech, which the world has long since outgrown. It is utterly incredible to those who have any tincture of modern science."

But why—*why*? No conception is unscientific which covers and explains the facts. Do those who reject St. John's conception find no facts which answer to it in their own consciousness and experience? I doubt it. And, at all events, I am bound to confess that in my own consciousness and experience I find many facts which answer to it, and which I cannot explain without it. And I am not naturally disposed toward it. Mere

authority has little weight with me. I heartily welcome all that science, all that the cultivated and growing reason of man, can teach. And this notion of a devil prompting men to sin has long been associated in my mind, as doubtless it still is in many of your minds, with many vulgar superstitions which the rising light of the Christian day has dispelled.

I say all this of myself, and of myself alone, though it is equally true of many of you, in part because I wish to pledge no one but myself to the maintenance of an unpopular conviction ; and in part because, if you share my somewhat sceptical habit of mind, I want you to feel that there must be strong reasons for the conviction I am about to defend. For what both you and I should dread far more than any charge of superstition and credulity is the charge of being unreasonable, of closing our eyes to facts we did not wish to see, or of handling them dishonestly because they led to unwelcome conclusions. If the facts point unmistakeably to the existence of the devil, we must—not believe in the devil indeed, for we *believe in* God ; but we must believe that there is a devil, and that he is very busy and very potent with us and with such as we, even if the belief should expose us to the charge of a vulgar credulity.

Now, for myself, I am conscious of *these* facts and such as these : Every day I live I hear a voice which is not mine, a voice which suggests that God is not what I have thought Him to be, what I still believe Him to be ; that He is not true, that He is not good, that He

does not care for me nor for the world, that He is not helping me to do that which is right or saving me from my sins, and even that He never will save me from them, and make me what I want to be. I feel every day an influence, or power, at work within me which sets me against my neighbours, which suggests that they have wronged me, that they do not requite my affection for them ; which leads me to doubt their virtues, to suspect their very kindnesses, to resent their offences, to see a judgment or a rebuke in any misfortune which befalls them, and even to wish them harm. I am aware of a spirit at work within my spirit which stirs up foul or selfish desires, which makes worship distasteful and obedience hard, which prompts me to give way to sensuous inclinations, and so to give up all the higher and nobler aims of the soul. There are times when this constant suggestion and persecution of the spirit in me becomes so strong, so vivid, so urgent, that, unless I am to yield to it, I have to "pull myself together" and shake it off as a thing wholly alien to me and wholly intolerable, to cry out on God and beg Him to shield and protect me from a force which in my own strength I am unable to resist.

If I could believe that this strange and dreadful experience were solitary and unshared, I might set it down to some special vice and weakness of my own nature ; but I cannot. So far as I can learn, it is common to all men ; and, in the best men, if it be not most active, it yet mounts to the keenest agony and produces the profoundest sense of shame and misery.

Who, or what, then, is it that injects these foul, these alien, these unbelieving and unloving, thoughts into our minds? St. John replies: "It is the devil"—*diabolos* being his name for an alien and evil spirit who slanders God to man and accuses men to God, and whose ruling aim it is to separate man from God, and man from man. Now that the power which St. John thus names *is* alien from us and inimical to us, our own consciousness attests; or why do we, as a rule, resist it? why do we at times gather up all our force and fling it from us as a thing abhorred? And that it is spiritual in its nature our consciousness and reason also attest; or how should it have access to the interior recesses of our spirits and exert its power there?

But much as we respect the insight, or even the inspiration, of St. John, before we can accept his hypothesis, his solution of this mysterious problem, we must at least have an answer to the question: "If we attribute the suggestion of certain sins to an evil spirit, may we not cast *the blame* of them on him, and so evade that responsibility for our own acts which our conscience stedfastly asserts?"

There are many answers to that question, and among them these: (1) Do we gain anything by rejecting St. John's hypothesis? If this apparently alien power which so strongly and constantly moves us to sin be *not* alien to us after all, if it be part of our own nature, who gave us that nature but God? Can it be wrong to act out the nature He has given us? Is it not inevitable that we should act it out? If the fountain of all our

evil be within us, may we not fairly plead that, being what we are, we cannot but sin ; and find an excuse for our wrong-doing in the qualities of the very nature which God has bestowed upon us ? Many do advance this excuse, this plea, and pronounce sin to be as natural to man as righteousness. That is to say, instead of throwing the blame of their offences on themselves or on the devil, they throw it on the God who made them what they are. But, surely, this is a more intolerable hypothesis than that of St. John ?

(2) The Bible nowhere relieves man from the responsibility of his own acts, the blame for his own sins. In the most emphatic way it charges his guilt upon himself. For to *suggest* evil is not to *compel* evil. When the devil slanders God to us, we are not *obliged* to believe him, and to distrust the God whom he maligns. When he seeks to divide us from our neighbours, we are not obliged, nor does St. John once hint that we are obliged, to do them the wrong which he suggests. The hypothesis of the Bible, taken as a whole, is that man, a spirit clothed in flesh, stands surrounded by myriads of spirits—some in the body, and some out of the body ; some evil, and some good—all of whom have a certain power of suggestion and degree of influence over him, but a power which it lies at his own option either to yield to or to resist. While it explains that strange consciousness of an evil and alien power or influence of which we are all aware, by telling us that there is an evil and alienated spirit who tempts us to our hurt, it does not so much as touch our personal responsibility for what we do : if it is

the devil who tempts us, it is *we* who sin. And yet it most potently assists and comforts us by assuring us that evil *is* alien to us and separable from us ; and by revealing to us that as we lie open on the one side of our nature to the suggestions of evil, so, on the other side, we are visited by the suggestions and influences of myriads of pure and kindly spirits, and even by the constant and strengthening ministry of the Spirit of all goodness and grace.

Now I put it to you which is the more reasonable and noble hypothesis? That which finds the origin of all which is evil, as well as all which is good, in man *in himself*, thus contradicting the affirmation of every man's conscience that, in doing evil, he yields to an alien power, while in doing good he acts naturally and rightly : or, that which places man in a world of spiritual influences and powers, good and bad, which he may either submit to or resist ; and thus finds the origin of his evil, as well as of his good, outside of and beyond himself, makes him capable of becoming either good or bad, and yet insists that in becoming evil he is traversing the proper currents of his being, and falling short of the end for which he was designed? Which of these two hypotheses will be more helpful to us in the conduct of life and in our intercourse with our fellow-men? If we believe that we and our neighbours are acting in accordance with our proper nature, with our original and inherent inclinations, tendencies, dispositions, in doing the evils to which we are prone, how can we blame either them or ourselves overmuch, and with

what face can we make a stand even against the evils we condemn? While, on the other hand, if we believe that we and they are engaged in a common conflict with an alien and usurping power, that the evil in us is separable from us, that we can only rise to our true height and full stature as men by separating or being separated from it, and that God Himself and all good spirits are with us and for us in this strange conflict: who does not see how this belief will strengthen us for the conflict with evil, bind us together in the fellowship of a common cause and a common aim, and comfort us with the hope of a final and complete victory?

“He that committeth sin is of the devil,” says St. John, *i.e.*, he has listened and yielded to the evil spirit which urges men to distrust God, and to hate one another. “*For,*” he goes on, “*the devil sinneth from the beginning.*” Now what does he mean by this? That *sin* was from the beginning? that evil is as old as good, and is therefore likely to last as long? That is impossible. The very word “sinneth” shews it to be impossible. For to sin is to transgress a law; and law is but an imperative expression of a Mind, a Will, perfectly wise and good. Law *was* before sin began, or could begin to be: for how should man or spirit transgress a law which had no existence? Good, then, was before evil, and is likely to outlast it. All that St. John can mean, therefore, by “the devil sinneth from the beginning” is that there is a spirit who sinned before man sinned, sinned from, or before, that “be-

ginning" in which man was created and made, and pronounced "very good;" that since the world began there never has been a time in which he was not inciting men to distrust the Lord who made them, the Father who loves them; that all evil, all our temptations and incitements to evil, may, in the last resort, be traced back to him.

This is St. John's hypothesis, his solution of the problem, which has perplexed the thoughtful of every age, the problem of good and evil. Without for a moment relieving us from the responsibility for our own acts, our own trespasses, he traces them up to the suggestions of an evil spirit who in various ways, by ministries and methods innumerable, has access to our spirits. And thus he explains that double consciousness of which I have spoken and of which we are all aware; tells us why we feel evil to be alien to us, and, if not unnatural, at least separable from our nature, and *so* separable that our nature only reaches its proper perfection as we break its bands asunder and cast away its cords from us. And, for myself, I find this hypothesis a reasonable one, and even the most reasonable. No other covers and explains the facts of which I am conscious in my own history and the history of my fellows. And as it is the most reasonable, so also it is that which most inspires us with courage and with hope. It frees us from that awful fear by which even the wisest of ancient times were tormented, the fear whether there may not be some limit in the power or some defect in the goodness of the Maker of men and of the world,

whether there may not be something to be avoided and fled from even in Him. For if we held evil to be a necessary and inseparable quality of the nature we derive from Him, how could we but fear that there was in Him the evil we find in ourselves? And while that fear was upon us, with what heart could we struggle against our own sins and faults and defects, or against those of the world around us? But if we believe that God is wholly and perfectly good: if we believe that evil is only an accident of the nature we derive from Him, that it may be separated from it without injuring it, nay, must be separated from it if it is not to be forever injured and degraded, why, then, we can make war upon it, whether in ourselves or in our fellows, with good heart, sure that in this warfare, whoever may be against us, God will be with us and for us.

For, finally, you will observe that St. John, as he traces the evil in us to an evil spirit, so also he traces the good in us to a good Spirit, to God Himself: "Who-soever is begotten of God doth not commit sin, because *his* seed abideth in him; and he cannot sin, because he is begotten of God." This, as I said in my last Discourse, is St. John's way of saying what St. Paul says of himself in his Epistle to the Romans: "When I would do good, evil is present with me. And so the good that I would, I do not; and the evil which I would not, that I do. But if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me:" sin that dwelleth *in* me, but is not *of* me. Both these great Apostles say, in short, precisely what our own

consciousness and experience say, that there is that in us which leans to evil and does it, and that there is that in us which hates evil, resists it, protests against it even when we do it, and will never consent to it. They trace both the evil and the good in us to sources outside and beyond ourselves. The evil in us springs from a hellish seed, the good from a heavenly seed ; the evil from a devilish seed, the good from a Divine seed. Whatever in us is of God is good, and only good ; for He is light, and there is no darkness in Him. Whatever there is in us of evil cannot be from Him ; it comes, and must come, from the evil spirit who has been a liar and a murderer from the beginning.

And the practical and blessed upshot of all this teaching is : That if any man is conscious that he has yielded to the evil influences to which he is exposed, rather than to the good, and is disposed to give up all hope of himself as one who can no longer pretend that he is begotten of God, as one who can only write himself down a child of the devil, St. John admits that, in so far as he has done evil and become evil, he has in very deed renounced God and made himself the child, or even the slave, of the devil ; but, taking him on that very ground, the Apostle bids him not despair of himself, but hope and strive. Virtually he says to such an one : "Though you have submitted to the devil when you should have resisted him, he has no claim on you, no right in you. *He* did not make you ; he does not love you. *God* made you, God loves you. *He* is your true Father. As you come to your true self, you will return

to Him. The evil that is in you is no real part of your nature. It is separable from you. God is seeking to separate and detach it from you. You have lost yourself for a while indeed ; but God is ever seeking that which is lost, until He find it. He is seeking you. The very misery and shame and self-condemnation you feel prove that He is seeking you, prove even that in some measure He has already found you. For if the devil were your true father, why should you be sorry and ashamed of having listened to him and served him? Your very shame and sorrow prove that you still feel that God is your true Father, that He alone has any real claim upon you. Arise, and go to Him. And as you go, you will find that He is on his way to you, that He began to seek you before you began to seek Him ; that while you were creeping sorrowfully to his feet, He was running to meet you, nay, flying on the wings of an all-forgiving and inalienable love."

And if God is thus gracious to the sinner who has fallen into the snare and bondage of the devil, how can we doubt that He will be gracious to those of us who are still struggling against evil, still refusing to consent and submit to it? "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

In St. John's teaching, then, there is hope and comfort for us all ; and a hope and comfort which will be all the more welcome to us, I think, because he does not ignore any of the facts of which we are conscious. He admits that we have sinned, that we have much cause

for sorrow and shame. But in our very sorrow and shame he finds the proof that we are in very deed the children of God, and not the children of the devil ; and finds, moreover, a sign and prediction of our ultimate recovery to his love and service.

XXII.

THE MISSION OF CHRIST.

“For this purpose (R.V., To this end) the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.”—
I JOHN iii. 8.

FOR some time now we have been trying to familiarize our minds with a few of the leading thoughts of St. John, thoughts which, as we have seen, run very deep, though they are expressed in the simplest words. Above all we have asked him to explain us to ourselves. For, like St. Paul, we find in our single nature a double personality. Two wills, two selves, two men are at strife within us ; a will to do good and a will to do evil ; a self which may be denied or even crucified, and a self to deny or crucify it ; a man which walks after the spirit and in the light, and a man which walks, in darkness, after the flesh : a man to which good is so natural and so dear that it utterly refuses to have any part in evil, even when we do it, and a man so fallen and impure that it *will* do evil, strive against it how we may.

St. Paul explains this mystery of human nature by the law of heredity, by tracing the evil will, or self, in us

up to the disobedience of the first Adam ; and the good will, or self, up to the obedience of the second Adam, the Man from heaven : in Adam all sinned ; in Christ all are made alive. But St. John traces the fountains of our being higher up and farther back. According to him, "he that committeth sin is of the devil, for the devil sinneth from the beginning ;" while "he that is begotten of God doth not and cannot sin, because he is begotten of God." John takes up his brother-Apostle's solution of the problem, as it were ; and where Paul writes *Adam*, he writes *Diabolos* ;¹ where Paul writes *Christ*, he writes *God*. His hypothesis is that man, himself a spirit clothed in flesh, stands surrounded by myriads of spirits, good and bad, all of whom have a certain power of suggestion or influence over him, but a power which it lies in his own option either to submit to or to resist. And thus, while he does not relieve us of the responsibility of our own deeds, while he binds that responsibility upon us by teaching us that even the prince and ruler of evil spirits may be resisted, nay, that even the Spirit of all grace may be resisted, if we will, he nevertheless does explain to us how it comes to pass that both evil and good have so strange a power

¹ "It will be observed that as St. Paul traces back sin to the typical representative of mankind, so St. John traces it back yet farther to a spiritual origin."—Canon Westcott on *The Epistles of St. John, in loco*. These four discourses on some of the ruling ideas of St. John were written in the spring of 1881, two years, therefore, before Canon Westcott's admirable Commentary appeared ; but, on reading it, I was gratified to find that, in general, he confirms the interpretation I had given of the two passages on which I wrote.

within us ; he does explain to us how it is that we feel evil to be alien to our nature and separable from it, even when we have yielded to it ; and how it is we feel that, only when we love and do that which is good, do we run in the proper current of our being, and fulfil the end for which we were created and made.

All this, however, is ground that we have gone over before. The text opens new ground to us. It supplies an answer to the one momentous question which our previous studies cannot fail to have suggested to us. For when we consider that strange opposition of nature of which we are all conscious, that inward and ceaseless conflict between good and evil from which we are not delivered even when we are "born from above," the one great question which forces itself upon us is : Will this conflict never come to an end ? and, if it will, *how* will it end ? If even Paul, after a life of conflict and service, still acknowledges himself to be the chief of sinners, and cries out in despair, "O, wretched man that I am ! who will deliver me ?" and if even John, knowing that he *has* eternal life, still affirms, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us ;" it is no marvel if we grow weary and lose heart, if we look forward with tremulous apprehension to the close and upshot of our warfare, or even if we sometimes fear that evil may prove to be stronger than good, both in us and in the world at large.

We have already, indeed, found some hopeful hints of what the end of this age-long conflict must be. From the fact that law must have been anterior to sin—for sin

is the transgression of law ; and how should any law be transgressed before it exists?—we have inferred that law will outlive sin. From our consciousness that, when we sin, we traverse the proper current of our being and fall short of the end for which we were made, we have inferred that the purpose of God in creating us must at last be fulfilled, and that at last we shall be delivered from the alien power which has oppressed and tormented us. But these inferences are either doubtful in themselves, or come to be doubted by us in the stress and pain of the conflict in which we are engaged. And hence we long for a more certain stay, for a surer hope, for some plain, direct, authoritative revelation of the end and will of God. And here, in these words of St. John, this very revelation is given us, and given in words so precise and yet so large and unconditional that, as we study them, I think you will feel that we have kept the best wine in this little Verse-cup until now.

There is no trifling with our anxiety, no evasion of difficulties, no uncertain sound, no doubtful or ambiguous sense, in the words: "*To this end—for this purpose—was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.*" They are quick with intention. They fly straight to the mark. They answer the very question we have in our minds, without qualification or reserve, in the simplest and most absolute terms. They will not shrink away and shrivel up as we handle them, and come to have no meaning or almost no meaning at all. On the contrary, the more we

handle them the larger their meaning will grow to be, and the more solid and indubitable.

What, then, are these works of the devil which the Son of God is to destroy? The main work, or function, of the devil is, as his very name indicates, to slander or accuse God to man, and, by his slanders, to separate man from God and man from man. Which of us has not been told—told with an air of authority which impressed us, and under conditions which made it look plausible—that God did not love us, that He was not caring for us, that He could not or would not save us? Which of us has not felt that these suggestions came to us from some source outside of and beyond ourselves, and that we had to sit in judgment on them, and to decide whether or not they were true? Which of us has not been told that to keep the law of God—to be veracious, honest, kind, unworldly, self-denying—was *not* the way either to true prosperity or to true happiness, and urged to seize on pleasure or success in ways which our conscience denounced and forbad? To which of us has not the suggestion been made that our neighbour did not love us, that he was not grateful for the kindness we had shewn him, that he was envious of some success or honour we had won; that he did not really like us, but was only seeking his private ends by feigning a regard he did not feel? In which of us has not some base passion—vanity, pride, jealousy, anger, concupiscence—been fanned and pampered till it became, for a time at least, the master passion of the soul, and compelled all reasonable and

kindly affections to yield to its malign and insatiable cravings?

All this, according to St. John, is *the work of the devil*, with all else which tends to induce distrust of God or to divide us from our brethren. *And Christ was manifested to destroy this work.* The eternal Life which was in God, and which God had always sought to impart to man, took human form and dwelt among us. In this manifestation of the Divine Life was there not a complete answer, a clear contradiction, to all the lies and slanders of the devil? If God did not love us, if He were not caring for us, why did He come down to us, and shew us the Life He wanted us to share? If He were unwilling or reluctant to save us, why did He send his Son to take away our sins? If obedience to his commandments were not the true way to life, happiness, peace, despite the self-repressions and self-denials it involves, why did Christ—to whom all ways were open—take that path? and why have men, with one voice, pronounced his life the noblest and most perfect the world has ever seen? Here, in Him, is the true life of man—in Him who did no sin, who was lowly, loving, pure, devout: how, then, can we any longer think to rise into our true life by vanity, selfishness, impurity, impiety? To those who really believe in Christ, the lies which have divided man from God, and man from man, are simply impossible and monstrous slanders, and they can only listen to them for a moment on pain of falling out of their fellowship with Him.

Thus, in this great sense at least—and it is by far the

greatest of all, though it may not seem the greatest to us—Christ came to destroy, and *has* destroyed, the work of the devil. He has laid the axe to the very root of that evil work ; and, the root being severed, how should the branches long continue to put forth leaf or fruit ?

But if we want some more direct assurance of the ultimate extinction of every form and every result of evil, we have only to note that, while I have spoken of the *work*, St. John assures us that the *works* of the devil are to be destroyed or dissolved—*all* his works, in the endless variety of their forms. Now we know, at least in part, how much that includes. The lies by which God has been made doubtful to men have brought forth a plentiful crop of infidelities, atheisms, agnosticism. The lies by which men have been led to distrust his care over them, or his love for them, have darkly flowered in worldliness, in superstition, in hypocrisy, in unbelief, in doubt and despair. The lies by which the path of obedience to his will has been rendered dubious and obscure, have bred all the selfish vices and widespread immoralities under which the world groans to this day. While the lies—often assuming forms of patriotism, wholesome ambition, and care for the world's good—by which man has been divided from man are answerable for the untold and inconceivable miseries of war, slavery, and all the evil lusts by which race is arrayed against race, and class against class. All the evils in the *conditions* of men, as well as all the evils in their hearts, spring, in the last resort

from this dark yet prolific source. All that makes life poor and mean, all that makes death an agony and a terror, all that clouds the beauty and limits the beneficence of this fair world in which we live, all that turns conscience into an eternal hell, whether here or hereafter—all these are among the works of the devil. All these, therefore, the Son of God came to destroy. To destroy them was the very "purpose" for which He came. Can a Divine purpose fail? Can the Son of God see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied until the very purpose for which He came and travailed is wrought out to the full? If not, what a flood of life, what a flood of hope, is poured on human life and destiny! Take St. Paul's words: "As in Adam the all die, so in Christ shall the all (*i.e.*, the totality of the human race) be made alive."¹ Take St. John's still deeper words: "He that sinneth is of the devil;" but "for this end was the Son of God manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil:" and how can you any longer ask, "What shall the end of these things be?" The end, the purpose of God, is distinctly disclosed to you, disclosed in the simplest words, in the amplest and most absolute terms, without ambiguity, without qualification, without reserve.

Nay, we are even permitted to see and forecast, in

¹ "It is curious that there are passages of Scripture which some persons will take literally, and other passages which, literal as they are, they will not. 'In Adam all die.' Yes, they say, that means everybody. But 'in Christ all shall be made alive.' Ah, they say, that does not mean everybody. Yet both these phrases are found in the same verse."—T. T. LYNCH.

some measure at least and to some extent, *how* this Divine purpose is to be carried out. When the Son of God came to us in great humility, having emptied Himself of the form of God and taken the form of a servant, He went about doing good, reconciling man to God and man to man. If He saved men's souls, He also healed their bodies, giving sight to the blind, feet to the lame, strength to the impotent, comfort to the sorrowful, life to the dead ; turning the world, once so hard and dark to them, as into a bright cheerful heaven in which they could walk and live as children of God, destroying the work of the devil in their outward conditions as well as in their inward state. And when He went up on high, to resume the form of God and the glory He had with the Father before the world was, He did not lift his hand from his redeeming work, but bent Himself to it with all the added force of his new form and glory. Ever since He rose He has been saving the souls of men, saving them in ever increasing multitudes, and, while saving their souls and by saving them, improving and ameliorating all the outward conditions of human life ; insomuch that, whereas the whole world seemed given over to evil when He left it, now, throughout the many and immeasurable "mansions" of Christendom at least, the world begins to look like a work of God, so strangely has the life of the world—of the unredeemed in it as well as the redeemed—been touched and raised by his grace. And as yet the work is only begun. The Inhabitant of Eternity, with whom a thousand years are but a day, has only as yet, so to speak, spent two of his

days in redeeming the world which it took Him six days to make ; and the Church which He has redeemed is still but half awake to her mission of redemption, and hardly understands that she, too, is called to destroy every work of the devil, whether those works are found in the social customs of men, or in their business habits, or in their sanitary and industrial conditions, or in their politics, no less than when they are found in their ethical or spiritual beliefs and practices.

Nor are the victories of the Son of God confined to this present world. In this very Chapter St. John tells us that it never has been manifested what we shall be, but that when Christ shall be manifested—manifested, *i.e.*, in his Divine and heavenly glory, we shall be like Him, because then at last we shall see Him as He is. This much, therefore, is clear ; that as we have borne the earthly image of the Son of God, so also we are to bear the image of his heavenly glory ; to be like Him as He *is*, as well as like Him as He *was*. For us at least, therefore, the conflict of which we are so weary, and which often looks so hopeless, is to issue in a triumph so splendid and conclusive that not only are all the works of the devil, which have marred us in body, soul, and estate, to be destroyed ; but we are to be raised in body, soul, and outward estate, into the unimaginable perfection and height in which Christ now sits at the right hand of God the Father.

But Christ, as we have seen, did not cease from his work of redemption when He ascended up into glory. He has done immeasurably more for us, and for the

world, since He went up on high than He did, or could do, for us while, emptied of his glory, He tabernacled on earth. Is He to cease from that work, then, when we join Him in glory, and are like Him because we see Him as He is? Or are *we* to cease from that work and mission of redemption, which He has called us to share with Him, when we enter the world in which He has been so busily at work for our salvation? How can we cease from it without ceasing to be like Him? If we are to share his glory—what is that glory but the glory of a love that can never change and never die? Nay, how can either He or we cease from the redeeming task and service so long as any work of the devil is anywhere undestroyed, so long as any iota of the “purpose” for which He came remains unfulfilled? *He* has not sunk into inactivity, wrapt in his own ease or absorbed in his own splendours, because He has risen out of the sorrows and infirmities of earth into the authorities and glories of the throne of heaven : and if we are to be with Him where He is, and to see Him as He is, and to be changed into his image from glory to glory because we receive grace upon grace from Him, how should *we* settle into an ignoble inactivity, or a selfish enjoyment of bliss, while any soul of man is still to be saved or any lurking work of the devil is to be undone? A future world in which there was to be a hell, as large, as populous, as lasting as its heaven, could hold no heaven for those who share the spirit of “the general Saviour of mankind,” or for that strong Son of God whose “Spirit” is but another name for an “immortal Love” which “does not

alter where it alteration finds, nor bend with the remover to remove."

I am very far from denying, or forgetting, that there are other passages of Scripture which seem to point in a different direction from this; passages which affirm the inevitable retribution that waits on sin, passages which warn us that time and opportunities once lost can never be recovered, passages even which menace the disobedient and impenitent with the horrors of a future torment. But when I am asked to let these passages override a large, generous, and express statement of the Divine purpose and end, like this of St. John's, or even when I am asked to combine the two, and to let the one modify and pare down the other, I demur. I am not content with reminding those who advance this plea, that they too often fail to let these large and bold, but plain and authoritative, statements of the Divine purpose modify *their* interpretation of the passages which threaten a future woe and defeat to those who love evil and do it. I object to the whole method of balancing text against text, and passage against passage, and inferring from them some poor thin residuum of truth which warrants us in faintly trusting the larger hope, or faintly yielding to the larger fear. I say, rather, *all* these passages are true, and must be true if they reveal the mind and come by the inspiration of God. They are not to be balanced, and modified, and pared down, till no one of them is altogether true, till no one of them really means what an honest reader would take it to mean. They are all true—true to the letter—true in their plain and obvious

sense. He that committeth sin, and persists in committing it, *is* of the devil, and will go to the devil whom he serves. He condemns himself, and must therefore be condemned by the Judge into "the æonian fire prepared for the devil and his angels." No salvation is possible to any man which does not save him from his sins, which does not really purge them out of him, which does not so deliver him from them that they can never more bear rule within him. To sin is, and must be, to suffer, here and hereafter, in the very citadel of the soul and in all the outward conditions of the soul : and so long as the sin remains the suffering will remain.

But in the law which binds suffering to sin, I, for one, see a Divine promise, and not a threatening whether devilish or Divine. For the Divine punishments are intended for our profit withal. The suffering comes that the sin may cease. The suffering continues that the sin may come to an end, and until it comes to an end. And hence I need not turn away from or modify so much as a single word of Scripture. When the Bible tells me that I and all men must suffer so long as we are impenitent and disobedient, so long as we commit sin and cleave to it, I say, Amen. And when the Bible tells me that a day is coming on which the end for which we suffer will be attained, that all sin must cease at the last, that all evil must be overcome of good, that all the works of the devil are to be destroyed, and that all men shall be made alive in Christ : shall I not say Amen to this too ? Yes, here, too, even as I read the grand prophetic words which disclose the very heart of God, which

reveal his final purpose and aim—"For this end was the Son of God manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil"—here, too, I will take the Divine utterance in its largest, simplest, deepest sense, sure that no words and no interpretation of mine can be too large for a purpose so divine, and say my Amen ; no longer faintly trusting the larger hope, but fearlessly and heartily committing myself to it.—*Amen.*

XXIII.

DESTRUCTION FROM THE FACE OF THE LORD.

“We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth ; so that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure : which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer : seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you ; and to you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ : *who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power ;* when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day.”—2 THESSALONIANS i. 3-10.

TAKEN as a whole, and looked at in a large general way, this passage offers us two illustrations of the justice of God. (1) God is just in that, here and now, He afflicts the righteous ; and (2) God is just in that, hereafter, He will destroy the insolent and impenitent sinners who, in Job's words, “persecute” the righteous “like God, and

are not satisfied with the pangs" which He inflicts upon them. In other words, God's justice is to be seen in *his* persecution of the righteous; and his justice is also to be seen in his punishment of *the men* who persecute them.

I. *God's justice is shewn in the afflictions which He Himself imposes on the righteous.* St. Paul congratulates the Thessalonians on the persecutions and tribulations they have faithfully and patiently borne, because these afflictions were "a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God," *i.e.*, a sign and proof of the Divine justice.

Now if that can be made out, I suppose you will all admit that it is a very lofty and elevating thought. You are familiar with the thought—which is also a very elevating and consolatory thought—that the *grace and kindness* of God are to be seen in all the tribulations which we endure for righteousness' sake. You know that if we suffer because we are in any measure good, and are trying to be better, it is very gracious of God to impose on us the sufferings by which we are established in our love of righteousness and made strong to pursue it. That suffering is a discipline of perfection, that we ought, therefore, to recognize the love of God in leading us through suffering to perfection, is a conviction of which you need no further proof, even though you cannot always welcome the gracious discipline by which *you* are being made perfect. And when you have heard weakly good men complaining of the losses and sorrows they have had to endure because they would not palter

with their conscience, and would be true to their convictions, I suppose you have often wondered that they could so far forget the very rudiments of the Christian Faith, and deny by their deeds the very principle they had so often confessed in word and tongue. When you have heard them querulously demand, "What have I ever done to deserve trouble like this?" I dare say you have been tempted to reply, "Truly, very little. *Deserve* it! Who *can* deserve so great a grace and honour as to be made a partaker in the affliction of Christ, in order that he may also share the perfection and glory of Christ?" Nay, even when you yourselves have had to suffer for the sake of truth and righteousness, doubtless there have been times when, rising into your best moods, you have rejoiced that you were counted worthy to suffer in so honourable a cause, and have confessed that you were graced beyond your deserts. "It is good for me to be afflicted," you have said, "and therefore it is good of God to afflict me."

"Good!" says St. Paul; "yes, but it is also *just*." While you humbly admit that you have not deserved so great a boon, he affirms that there is a sense in which you *have* deserved it. And this is a much higher thought. There is more pith in it, more power. It is so great a thought that, when we first meet it, we instinctively ask, "But can it be made out?" St. Paul makes it out thus. God permitted many persecutions and tribulations to come on the young and ardent converts of Thessalonica, "*in order that they might be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which they were suffering.*"

Now to be "*counted* worthy" is, in the Divine sense of the phrase, to be *made* worthy. So that the end, the design, for which God afflicted them, or permitted them to be afflicted, was that they might grow more worthy of the kingdom into which they had been called, wiser and more instructed in its laws, more practised and skilful in its duties, trained for more onerous and honourable service.

Do you say again, "That was very good of God, very kind; but how was it *just*?"

It was just on the principle which the King Himself lays down, "To him that hath it shall be given." If any man uses his capacities to the full, they must grow by use. If a man does his best in any service while occupying its lower posts, and so shews that he is competent to fill a higher post and do more and better work, it is but fair and reasonable that he should be called up higher, and set to do the best work he is able to do. This, I take it, is the principle latent in St. Paul's words. God had called the Thessalonians into his kingdom and service. They had come into the kingdom at his call; and, considering how short a time they had been in it, they had done wonderfully well in his service. It was but fair and just, therefore—at least in the righteous judgment of God—that they should be called to a higher post, to more honourable tasks; called, therefore, to a more liberal and effective discipline which should fit them for their new tasks and honours. Suffering was at once a higher kind of work than believing, and a discipline which would strengthen them for still more

arduous and honourable service in the cause they had espoused. Hence it was *just* in God to afflict them. Their tribulation was a manifest token of his approval of their past conduct, and a manifest token of the equity with which He renders to every man his due, and gives to each the task and the discipline which each requires.

Now I call that a grand thought, for it is both a strong and a strengthening thought, a thought for which we ought to be very grateful to St. Paul. It is meat for men, not milk for babes. If I could but know how you severally take it, I should be able to tell which of you are men in Christ, and which of you are spiritual babes, and babes *not* "crying for the light," but for mere ease and self-indulgence. The Apostle gives "love" the palm over "faith" and "hope;" but I am by no means sure that he would not have given "justice" the palm over love itself; or, rather, I am sure that he would, had he not so conceived of love as to include justice in it. And the special value of the thought I am trying to press home upon you is that, while our sufferings for righteousness' sake, while *any* suffering which is righteously borne, is a manifest token both of the love and of the justice of God, it is to the justice of it rather than to the love that St. Paul calls our attention.

You that suffer, then, remember that whatever your suffering may be, if you bear it with faith and patience, you may take it as a proof both of God's justice and of his love. It is a proof of his love; for He is seeking to make you perfect, to make you worthy of the divine kingdom, the kingdom of life and righteousness and

peace, by a discipline more gracious and effective than you can possibly have deserved. And it is a proof of his justice ; for though *you* can claim no merit, though you feel that you have deserved nothing of Him, *He* holds that, in so far as you have been faithful and diligent in his service, you are worthy to be called, through a severer discipline, to a higher service. He holds that, if you have done well in the past, He is bound to help you, even partly against your will, to do better in the time to come. And if you can take your affliction, your loss, your bereavement thus ; if you regard it as a Divine summons to endure a more searching discipline that will train you for a higher, a more useful, and therefore a more honourable life : is there not in that conviction a power capable of sustaining and consoling you under the sharpest strokes and heaviest pressures of tribulation ? If you are in very deed seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, then whatever makes you worthier of that kingdom, or more fully possesses you of that righteousness, cannot fail to be welcome to you, however painful it may be.

II. As in the afflictions of the righteous, so also *in the future punishment of the men who afflict them, we are to see the justice of God*. "He will tribulate them that tribulate you," says St. Paul to the Thessalonians (Verse 6). "To you He will by and by give rest from all your toils, release from all your troubles. But to them He will mete out the punishment they deserve. Both the Gentiles that know not God, and the Jews who will not receive and obey the gospel, shall be *punished with ever-*

lasting destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his power, when He shall come to give every man his due" (Verses 7-10).

If any man ask, Why are men to be punished for afflicting the righteous when God Himself afflicts them? we must remind him that the moral value of actions is determined by the motives which prompt and inspire them. God afflicts the righteous in order to make them more worthy of his kingdom, in order that He may train and promote them; and therefore we acknowledge Him to be both kind and just in afflicting them. But men afflict them either because they are indifferent to the kingdom and righteousness of God, or because they hate that righteousness and all who pursue it: and therefore, their motive being both unkindly and unjust, it is just of God to punish them for it.

This, I think, is a fair reply to the first question suggested by St. Paul's words. But if any man go on to ask, "But is it just that men should be punished with 'everlasting,' or 'eternal,' 'destruction,' that they should die, perish, be lost for ever, for sins committed in the brief hours of time, and sins to which they were led by the habits and conditions of the time in which they lived? what are we to say to him? what are we to say even to ourselves?"

Obviously, the first right thing to say is, Let us be sure that we understand the Apostle. Let us get at the very and true meaning of his words. His words, with many similar words in the New Testament, are taken by a large but decreasing majority of the Church to

mean nothing short of this : that the impenitent when they die, or at the day of judgment, will be condemned to an endless torment. But do they fairly carry that meaning ?

(1) Observe, first, that these words—death, destruction, perdition—even taken as they stand, tell *against* the current interpretation, and not for it. So far from implying that the sinners against whom they are launched will for ever be kept alive in order that they may be tormented for ever, they imply, rather, that they will be annihilated, lost to life, destroyed out of it, extinguished.

(2) Observe that the word translated “destruction” is a very strong word, and commonly means the utter ruin and extinction of the person or thing of which it is predicated. So that we must expect to find some severe and terrible import in the doom here pronounced on those who did not know, or did not obey, the gospel of Christ.

(3) Observe that the word rendered “eternal” in our New Version, and “everlasting” in the Old, is the word *αἰώνιος*, and means æon-long, or agelong ; and that an “agelong destruction,” a ruin or death which is only to last for an age, cannot be a final and complete destruction. Whatever the doom may be, and however terrible, it cannot be that of extinction, utter cessation of being. The adjective must qualify the noun ; and though we might take “destruction” to mean death, annihilation, if it stood alone, as it does not stand alone, as it is qualified and limited by the epithet “agelong,” we cannot

take it to imply a final and irreversible doom, but a doom the term of which is fixed, a doom which may be revised, and even reversed, at the end of the age.

And (4) observe that the word is still more strangely qualified by the latter part of the phrase of which it forms part: "*Punished with agelong destruction from the face of the Lord and the glory of his power.*" It is not an absolute or final destruction which is threatened, but a conditional and relative destruction, a being banned from a certain transcendent manifestation of the Divine Grace and Splendour for at least an age. But, if we are to be fair, we must admit, I think, that an agelong *destruction*—a being done to death for an age—must mean something more and worse than an agelong *deprivation*. The word is so strong that it surely must mean something more than absence and loss, more than that those who wittingly and wilfully reject the gospel of Christ will be banished from the scene in which the triumph of Christ is to be displayed: it must imply the endurance of an eating and devouring ruin, a protracted death, full of pangs, full of terrors. And the question we have to solve is, What does this strange, enigmatic, and paradoxical sentence, so strong and yet so curiously qualified, really mean? What can be implied in this doom to a death which is to last through an age—as long as the Christian epoch, let us say—and which yet is to be open to reconsideration at the end of that age, and perhaps to reversal? What are we to make of a destruction, not positive and absolute, but conditional, which will not make an end, or even a hopeless ruin, of a man's life,

but which will nevertheless banish him, and do more, and worse than banish him, from the Source of all life and joy?

It must be admitted that the question seems a very difficult one, that a death, a perdition, a destruction which is to last *for an age*, and *only* for an age, appears to be a contradiction in terms, and that, therefore, those who mistake its meaning are not to be condemned with any severity. But if you will candidly consider how these words—"death" and "destruction"—are commonly used in Scripture, I believe you will see that the contradiction is only an apparent one. We are told, for example, that Adam died on the day he sinned. But was that death a final and complete cessation of his existence? We are told that he died again when his breath left his body and his body returned to dust. But, even then, did the man Adam wholly perish and pass away? When we ourselves were *dead in trespasses and sins*, did we cease to be? When we *died to sin*, did we cease to be? When we shall *die out of this life*, shall we cease to be? Here are three deaths which we may all die before we can get clear of this world—the death in sin, the death to sin, the death which precedes and occasions the dissolution of the body: and yet no one of these implies the loss either of our identity or of our existence.

So, again, with the word rendered "perdition" or "destruction." When Job said, "He hath *destroyed* me on every side, so that I am gone," did he mean that he no longer existed? If he did, who was it that uttered

this complaint against God ? When St. Peter says that the world was *destroyed* by the flood, did he mean that the earth vanished from the solar system ? When he says, "the heavens and the earth shall *perish*," so far from intending to predict that they shall cease to be, he goes on to tell us that, in perishing, they will bring forth a new heaven and a new earth.

Indeed if you will examine the Scriptures for yourselves, I think you will be driven to the conclusion, that in Holy Writ "death" is everywhere represented as a change of conditions and relations, never as the cessation of being ; that "destruction" is invariably regarded as a catastrophe that effects the change out of which new life, or a new order of conditions and relations, is to emerge. St. Paul lays down, in a figurative form, the principle which governs all the destructions and deaths of which the Bible speaks in the words, "That which thou sowest is not quickened *except it die*." And our Lord lays it down still more plainly in his great saying, "He that *loseth* his life shall *save* his life."

The simple fact is that we are denizens of many worlds even while we are in this world : there is the outward physical world ; there is this present *evil* world, the world of darkness and corruption ; and there is the world, or kingdom, of life and righteousness and peace. And the only way into any of these worlds is to be born into it ; while the only way out of any one of them is to die out of it. The death of the body is the way out of the natural or phenomenal world. Death to sin is the way out of the world of evil and corruption. The

death of the soul is the way out of the world of righteousness and peace. And each of these deaths is accompanied or succeeded by, is indeed an indispensable condition of, a corresponding life. When we die out of this natural world of fair appearances, we pass into the real, the spiritual, world. When we die unto God, we plunge into the dark kingdom of evil. When we die unto sin, we live unto God. And if this be so, if this be the sense in which the Scriptures constantly use the words Death and Destruction, if they never imply the cessation of being, but only a change of being and condition, why should what is called "the second death" be so unlike the first as that it must denote the final and irrevocable cessation of existence? The reasonable and logical inference is, rather, that it shadows forth some dark and terrible change in the mode of being, some change in the manner in which we shall be related to good and evil.

And so we reach our conclusion. Viewing it in the light of Scripture usage, we may safely say, on the one hand, that St. Paul's "agelong destruction" from the face and glory of the Lord means neither a never-ending life of never-ending torment, nor the utter ruin and annihilation of life. And, on the other hand, we may safely infer that it means something more, and worse than an agelong deprivation from beholding the Lord (*i.e.*, Christ) in the full tenderness of his grace, the full splendour of his glory. It means that, for their sins, certain impenitent and incorrigible offenders will be doomed—*self*-doomed—to endure a long and weary

age of suffering resembling the pangs of physical death, resembling the pangs of death to sin ; full of contrition, therefore, we may hope, as well as full of pain ; full of remorse and apprehension and a fearful looking-for of judgment, such as a great and hardy sinner feels now and here when he sees the errors of his ways and tries to turn and live. God's intention in inflicting this age-long agony may be, must be, to quicken them, through the pangs of death, into a new and better life. They have rejected the gospel here, and the ministry of the Spirit of all grace. They may have fallen away after having been enlightened, after having tasted the good word of life and the powers of the world to come, after having been made partakers of the Holy Ghost : so that in this world, in which they have rejected the highest and tenderest ministries of the grace and love of God, it may be impossible to renew them again to repentance. But that which is impossible *here* need not be impossible *hereafter* ; that which is impossible while the sacred realities of the unseen world are hidden from men by veils of flesh, may no longer be impossible when they stand face to face with them. *Then* the repentance they could not feel here may stab them to the very heart, may plunge them in agonies of shame and fear and remorse which shall eat into and slay their souls during the long years of their appointed condemnation, in order that at last, by losing their life, they may find it, by dying they may live.

What the manner of that death may be, we cannot tell, and do not much care to speculate. But even a

speculative illustration may serve to bring home to you the meaning and force of this "agelong destruction." You know, then, that when a man has exorbitantly indulged any vicious craving—*e.g.*, a craving for drink, his craving gets to be his master, and exerts an automatic and irresistible power over him, so that we no longer hold him responsible for what he does. Is there any hope for such an one? Yes, death may be his friend, and, in some sense, his saviour. It may release his soul from the body he has abused, and so break the chain of automatic habit which has its seat and throne in the flesh. He may have to suffer horribly before he dies, in his death, after he is dead, for having put himself in the power of his base craving. But, the body being dead, the power of the merely physical appetite or habit is broken.

Death separates the soul from the body. But the Divine Spirit, by whom men are renewed unto life everlasting, pierces deeper still, dividing in sunder the very soul and spirit. And it may be that the second death, the agelong destruction, is but a symbol of the process by which this more inward division is effected. It may be that the *soul* must die in order that the spirit may live. It may be that when the soul dies, the power of those sinful habits and cravings which have their seat in the soul may be broken, and the spirit be thus set free to enter on a course of discipline by which it may be made meet for the life and kingdom of God.

This is but a speculation, however, though not an improbable one I think. Take it for what it is worth.

All I want to impress upon you is, that the agelong destruction with which St. Paul threatens those who reject the gospel against themselves must be a doom more terrible than the mere pangs of physical death, as much more terrible as the agonies of a dying soul transcend those of a dying body: and that it is just, and even kind, of God to expose men who have rejected all the ministries of grace brought to bear on them in this world, to the more searching and protracted ministries of the world to come, in order that at last they may pass from death into life, from sin and its attendant miseries, into righteousness and peace.

So that we who trust the larger hope, and believe in the restitution of all souls at last, make light neither of the severity nor of the goodness of God. We believe that, in his justice, He will search the souls of the impenitent through and through with pangs which we can but faintly conceive; and we believe that, in his goodness, the end and design of this agelong destruction will be that, at last, they may be recovered unto life eternal.

XXIV.

THE SON OF MAN THE SAVIOUR OF THE LOST.

“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost.”—LUKE XIX. 10.

THERE is a singular and impressive force in these most characteristic words. They contain the secret of Christ's power over the hearts of men, the secret which distinguishes Him from all other teachers and raises Him so high above them. The truths He taught had, in some measure, been anticipated by Hebrew rabbis and heathen moralists. The very golden rule itself was not uttered first by Him. Long before He came to dwell among us, it had fallen from the lips both of Rabbi Hillel and of the Chinese sage, Confucius. We do not claim absolute originality, therefore, for all the sayings, or even for some of the greatest sayings, of the Man Christ Jesus. We admit that many of them were anticipated by men who were moved by his Spirit and illuminated by his light, although they knew it not. But *this* at least was peculiar to Him—that He taught to *all* the truths which both rabbi and sage had reserved for the select and instructed few. *They* had held that wisdom

was only for the wise, and spoke only to those who had devoted themselves to a life of study and self-culture. As for the common people, "the unlettered herd," they were "altogether born in sin," and were better left to the gross superstitions and degrading immoralities in which their fathers had perished before them. But, with Christ, a new thing appeared on the earth. Instead of betaking Himself to the Rabbinical schools or the academies of the Wise, He addressed Himself to the ignorant and rude, and even to the outcast and the vile. He called around Him not the noble and the learned, but the unlettered and despised; and to *these* He unfolded the hidden secrets of wisdom, the very "mysteries" of the kingdom of heaven. Not in words alone, therefore, but in the eloquence of gracious deeds, He said: "I am come to seek, and to save, that which was lost."

1. Novel and surprising as was the course He took, it nevertheless appeals to a profoundly human instinct, and that in more ways than one. For it is very true, as our Lord Himself points out, that what we have *lost* takes a special dearthness and value in our thoughts. If a woman has lost only a single piece of silver, even though it be out of a full purse, she thinks more of the one missing coin than of the many safe in her pocket, and cannot be content, if nothing less will serve her turn, till she has swept the house in her search for it. If a man has lost only one sheep out of a hundred, the one stray sheep usurps all his care; and he will leave the ninety and nine safe on the mountain or in the fold, and painfully "search" the wilderness until he has found it. If a

father has lost but one son out of many, he is devoured by anxiety for him ; for the children who are always with him, and who never at any time transgress his commandment, he has no care, or cares that soon pass ; but the prodigal's mere absence keeps him constantly in his father's thoughts, and breeds a care which can know no end nor abatement until the wanderer return.

But if God be our Maker, if it is He who has put these kindly instincts and yearnings into our hearts, He also will have a special care for those who most need his care,—for the silly sheep who have left the fold, for the foolish and unthankful children who have left their home and rest in Him. If God be indeed the Pastor and Bishop of our souls, He will leave the myriads who are safe on the heavenly mountain, to seek for those who have gone astray. If God be in very deed the Father of our spirits, He will not only welcome the repenting prodigals who return to Him ; He will send servant after servant, brother after brother, to bring them back. Nay, He will come Himself, come even to the far country into which they have wandered, to quicken the memory of home and the thought of return in their hearts. He will come to them again, as they are on their way home, to guide and sustain them amid the difficulties and perils of the way. And He will come to them yet once more as they reach his gate, to bid them enter and to satisfy them with his love. It is because God *is* our good Shepherd, our good Father, that, in the person of the Son of Man, He Himself came to seek and to save that which was lost.

But does He *still* come, and come to *us*? Yes, He still comes, and will come so long as a single soul is straying on the dark mountains or wandering as in a pathless wilderness. We are not to think of God as having once come to earth, and as then having gone up and back into some inaccessible heaven. We are rather to think of Him as *always* coming,—as having come, long before the Advent, to draw men to Himself by every wise thought and every pure emotion quickened within their hearts; and as coming still, and coming to us, through all our memories of Christ and all our experience of his mercy, that He may gather us into his arms, and rejoice over us with a joy unspeakable and full of glory.

Consider, for a moment, how He comes to men to-day, how He comes to *you*. There is not one of you, even the youngest or least instructed, who does not know something of the Son of Man. You know how He came and dwelt among us, a man such as we are, with no distinction above his fellows save “the white flower of a blameless life.” You know He taught men that God was their Father, and loved them, and was seeking to prepare them, by redeeming them from their sins and by giving them the power of a pure and happy life on earth, for the perfect blessedness of heaven. This, and much more, He taught, as you know, in picturesque sayings and simple stories, which lingered in the ears of men, and entered in at many lowly doors from which all forms of dogma, logic, and philosophy would have been quite shut out.

Now, as you think of Him, what do you first and most easily recall? Probably you remember that He was very kind to the poor and sick; that He freely healed them of whatsoever disease they had, and yet so healed their bodies as to excite in them a craving for health of soul. You remember that He was fond of little children, that He liked to be in the company of good women, though He was nevertheless most tender and pitiful to the outcast and the fallen; that He preferred the society of the poor, the simple, and the weak to that of the rich and learned and mighty; and that He clothed the most perfect wisdom, and truths the most profound, in words so plain and simple, and yet so penetrating and so full of charm, that none of his hearers, however hardened and rude, could have been untouched by them and unimpressed. Our first thoughts of Christ, those which come to us most easily and naturally, are of this kind; that is to say, they are of a kind to make us love the Man, the Teacher, the Friend, even before we know Him as our Saviour. And, as we recall such facts as these, we feel how true it is that He came *to seek the lost*—to *search* for them, as the Greek verb implies, with a solicitous and yearning love which could not be satisfied until He had found them.

But if He came to "*seek*" the lost, He also came to "*save*" them. And, as we pursue our recollections of his life and ministry, we find in Him the Saviour as well as the Seeker. For, although He was kind, and tender, and ready with his help, He was not so happy as we should have thought that One so good must be. He

was the Man of Sorrows, the familiar Acquaintance of grief. Why does *He* sigh, and weep, and groan—He at whose touch all other grief is turned into joy? It is not simply that He is not understood and loved by those about Him. Nor is it that He has failed to redeem men from their miseries and sins; for even on the Cross, forsaken of God and rejected by men, He knows that his redeeming work is “finished.” It is, rather, that the deep sense of human sin and misery, and of the slow sad years which must elapse before his finished work will take effect upon them, presses upon Him with a constant and a weary weight: it is that all the sorrows of the men He so dearly loves run into the cup of which He must drink: it is because He can only save them from their sins by being “made sin” for them, because He who knew no sin must nevertheless bear the iniquity of us all. And as we think of the constant and intolerable agony which He endured through life, and which culminated in his passion and death; as we remember how that just Person was tortured by and for our sins, we begin to understand how monstrous and unnatural sin is, to loathe it, to seek to be quit of it, to ask strength of Him who alone of the sons of men never once yielded to it, and who died that He might overcome it both for Himself and for us.

So often as we thus remember Christ, and how He came to seek and save the lost, the Son of Man *comes again* through our memory of Him, and comes *to us*. It is *He* who has quickened these tender, penitent, and gracious thoughts within us; through these thoughts He

is *seeking* us—seeking, and I pray God *finding* us—that He may draw us to Himself, that He may bring us to God. He lived that life of wondrous kindness and wondrous sorrow that we might hear of it, and might learn from it how good God is, how willing to redeem and bless us. And so often as the memory of his life touches and affects our hearts, He is once more on the earth; He is with us in the power of his Spirit, though not in the weakness of his flesh. He is searching for us, that He may reclaim us from our wanderings, that He may save us from our sins.

I am using no mere figure of speech, therefore, I am but giving the simplest expression to a simple fact, when I say that Christ is with us *now*, and is now seeking that He may save us. If any thought of Him has touched and softened your hearts, that inward motion of your soul is but a first and faint response to the seeking love of Christ. He is looking for you, searching for you, longing to save you from all evil. If you give your heart free play, and turn to Him, and cast yourselves on the Love He came to shew and to reveal, He will save you unto life everlasting.

2. *This*, then, is the first and leading sense of these most gracious words—that the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost in sin, those who have wandered away from God and alienated themselves from the life that is in Him. But it is by no means the only, it is not even the largest, sense, of the words. For, you will observe, they are not limited as we instinctively limit them. Christ does not say that He came to seek

and to save that which is lost *in sin*: it is we who supply the final and qualifying words of that sentence, and rightly supply them, provided we remember that they are our words and not his. For to be lost *in sin* is only one, though it be the worst, of the many ways in which a man may be lost. He may be lost in the crowd of men as well as in the wilderness of sin. He may be lost in doubt and fear, because men misjudge and condemn him. He may be lost, wasted, robbed of his proper use and joy in the world, because of the narrow and inauspicious conditions into which, by no fault of his own, he has been thrust and from which it is impossible for him to escape. And we shall not reach either the full meaning, or the full comfort, of our Lord's words unless we understand from them that, *in whatever sense we may be lost*, He has come to seek, *i.e.*, to find us, and to save us. His words bear that meaning even when taken by themselves, for no limit or condition is attached to them; and, when once we read them in the light of their context, it becomes simply impossible to put any narrower or restricted meaning upon them.

Here, in St. Luke, for instance, they form part of the story of Zaccheus. But Zaccheus, although a publican, was not a sinner, in the sense in which we commonly use that word. He was very far from being utterly lost or sold under sin. He was, as our Lord Himself testifies, a true "son of Abraham," although those who sat in Moses' chair had cast him out of the synagogue; and, as we learn from Zaccheus's own lips, he was in the habit of giving the half of his goods to the poor; while if,

in the discharge of his official functions, he unintentionally wronged any man, he returned a fourfold compensation for the unintentional wrong. It is *he* who first seeks Jesus, not Jesus who seeks him ; and no sooner does he find the Son of Man and hear his voice, than he loves Him, welcomes Him to all that he has, and commits himself wholly to his guidance and care.

How, then, could this true son of Abraham, who thirsted for and welcomed the "salvation" that came to his house, be counted among the lost ? Simply because, though not utterly lost in sin, he *was* utterly lost to name and fame and use. In the little world of Jericho in which he moved, he was despised and condemned, despite his wealth, and his generous use of his wealth. Just, honourable, kind, he was misjudged and condemned. And to the Church, as represented by the devout Jews of the place, he was even more despicable than to the world ; for they held him to be not merely the base tool of an alien and oppressive tyranny, but also a traitor to his country and a renegade from the only true faith. Even the common people, not devout, and of no weight in the social world of Jericho, murmured when they found that the Prophet of Nazareth had "gone to lodge with a man who was a sinner." *They* had no sort of doubt that Zaccheus was lost, lost beyond redemption ; and very probably Zaccheus, when he found all that was pious and respectable in the city turned against him, shared their opinion ; and, though he still carried himself like a true son of Abraham, doubted whether even father Abraham himself

would acknowledge him, and doubted still more painfully whether the God of Abraham could possibly care for him, and take note of his struggle to live an honest and a godly life.

Lost to men, he was nevertheless dear to God ; and hence the Son of Man and God brings salvation to his house—salvation from his doubts and fears, as well as from his sins. And who can tell what comfort, what joy, this Divine recognition brought to the heart of Zaccheus ? It was hard for a publican not to be a sinner. It was harder still to be just when injustice was so easy, and generous when exactions would have been so safe. It was hardest of all that a just and generous life should win no recognition, no respect, no gratitude, even from those who benefited by it ; to be neglected, despised, condemned by men who assumed to be the friends of God and the interpreters of his will, and to maintain year after year a struggle which won no approving response whether from Heaven or earth. Few of *us*, I suppose, have been called to confront conditions so unhappy as those of Zaccheus, or to bear a burden so heavy as his. And yet there may be those among us who have known what it is to go day by day to a vocation the conditions of which were unfavourable to the growth and development of the spiritual life, or to have our justice mistaken for injustice, or our generosity for self-seeking, or our usefulness limited and impaired by dislikes and suspicions we had done nothing to deserve ; or to be condemned and feared as enemies of the truth, for our very devotion to the truth ; or to be despised and

rebuked as averse to all godliness simply because we strove to let godliness be no longer a mere form to us. In whatever way we have been "lost," in whatever way we have suffered from the prejudices of the world or the Church, and even though at times we have feared lest God Himself should have failed to look upon us and to be gracious to us, there comes to us from the saying of Christ this immense comfort ;—that it is precisely such as we are whom He has come to seek and to save ; that *He* is our Friend, let who will be our enemy ; and that, so long as we are true to God and to our best thoughts of what He requires of us, God Himself is our Friend, and will yet shew Himself to be our Saviour.

That brave little Zaccheus, standing up so faithfully against both the world and the Church, true to God, true to conscience, true to duty, amid all the scorn and contumely and shame lavished upon him, has a better name now in all the world, and perhaps also a higher place in heaven, than any of the neighbours who despised him. *We* love and applaud him, though they did not : we wish we possessed more of his spirit, more of his courage and unfaltering devotion. And if we do in any measure share his spirit, we may be sure that we shall also share in the salvation that came to him and to his house.

3. Finally, according at least to some of the best and oldest copies of our Gospels, the words, " For the Son of Man came to save that which was lost," are found in the 18th chapter of St. Matthew, and the 11th verse. And in this connection it is so difficult to arrive at their

meaning, that I am disposed to think they *must* have been uttered in it by our Lord, since surely no one would think of inserting them here, as if they explained the sequence of thought. They are so far from explaining anything, that they introduce a difficulty where, otherwise, all would be clear. In any case—for at this late period of my discourse, I must not stay to discuss a critical point—they afford a welcome illustration of the fact on which I have already insisted; *viz.*, that the Son of Man came to save us, let us be lost in what way we may: for, as I understand them, they are here a prophecy that the very conditions of our existence shall be ultimately adapted to the growth and development of our true life.

Our Lord had taken, as St. Matthew reports, a little child into his arms, and set him up as a model for his disciples, assuring them that only as they became “little children” could they enter into his kingdom. And then He had exhorted them not to despise “these little ones” whose angels stood near the throne of God, because the Son of Man came to save that which was lost. But how could He think of little children as *lost* when He had just declared them to be special objects of the Divine care and love, and had warned us men that, only as we become like them, can we enter into his kingdom? Obviously He did not think of them as lost in sin, nor as hated and despised of men. In *what* sense, then, could He pronounce them lost? If you will consider the point for yourselves, I think you will see that the Son of Man, knowing what the world was like and what

children grew up to be—how they fell away from their simplicity, their innocence, their frankness, their unworldliness—could not but deem them “lost” in being cast on such a life as this, in being brought into a world so unlike a true and fitting home for their guileless spirits; a world in which they were sure to lose the very qualities which He valued and admired in them, and bade his disciples imitate. But if that were his meaning, then his declaration, “The Son of Man is come to save the lost,” is nothing less than a prophecy that He will yet so change the world, so purify and uplift its life, that at last it shall become a pure and fitting home for the children born into it, a home in which all that we love and admire in them, instead of being thwarted and repressed and lost, shall unfold itself as in a genial and kindly atmosphere, grow to its full strength, and bring forth, in happy abundance, the peaceable fruits of righteousness. In other words, I take this great saying to signify, in the last resort, that we are to be delivered from all the conditions which make our true life, the life of the spirit, hard to us, and painful and perilous; that the world itself is to be so changed and redeemed as that to walk after the spirit and not after the flesh will become normal and natural to man, the common life of the whole human race, and we shall carry the spirit of the little child into all the labours of manhood and all the counsels of age. And that is true, whether the truth be taught here or not. For no one who faithfully accepts the New Testament as a revelation of the will of God can doubt that a time is coming, and must

come before the salvation of man can be complete, in which our outward environment will be subdued to our inward bent, and the very creation itself be redeemed from its bondage to vanity and corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

In these words of the Son of Man, then, there is grace, comfort, invitation for us all. In whatever way or sense we recognize ourselves as lost, so long as we are lost we are of those whom He is seeking, and seeking with a solicitous and yearning love which can be satisfied with nothing short of our salvation. If we are lost in sin and in the miseries it breeds, He is seeking us, and seeking that He may save. If we are lost and overlooked in the crowd around us, *He* does not overlook us. If we are struggling to do our duty, to be just and kind to those who give us no sympathy, no respect, no gratitude, and feel that all our efforts to do them good are lost upon them, they are not lost upon Him. If we are distrusted, hated, despised by men, if the very Church itself should distrust us because, though we are following Christ, we do not follow with them, or think as they think, and serve as they serve, yet no throb of loyalty to truth, no endeavour to serve Him, however imperfect it may be, is lost upon Him or will fail to win his love and approval. If we have to waste our strength in the struggle with ungenial conditions, with sordid cares, with toils that seem to narrow and depress and deaden the life of the soul, with temptations from within and from without which seem to thwart our growth and to pervert our very virtues, still, if we shew ourselves faithful

and brave in this struggle with adverse conditions, let us know, for our comfort and support, that we are to see and to inherit a new heaven and a new earth, all the conditions of which will be favourable to our growth in righteousness and charity, and in which we shall be happily at home. So that to *all* who are weary and heavy laden, whatever the source from which our weariness may spring, there comes this day a word from Christ which both invites us to rest in Him, and assures us that He is preparing a place of rest and joy for us.

XXV.

THE SON OF LOSS.

I.—THE SIN OF ISCARIOT.

“Those whom thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost but the son of loss.”—JOHN xvii. 12.

“Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, and said, What are ye willing to give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they weighed unto him thirty pieces of silver. And from that time he sought opportunity to deliver him unto them.”—MATTHEW xxvi. 14-16.

THE name of Judas has become a byword of covetousness and perfidy. All that we connect with him in our thoughts—“the bag of Judas,” “the kiss of Judas,” and even the innocent “thirty pieces of silver” have become symbols of ignominy; they are brands which we reserve for the basest traitors to love or country. When Dante, in his fantastic description of Hell, sets Judas apart from the rest of the damned, assigns him in the lowest deep a deeper still, and makes him the prey of the very prince of the devils, he does but express, in his peculiar form and in the gross images of the mediæval theology, the conviction of the whole Christian world.

And yet have we the right to cast even Judas beyond the pale of humanity, or even to condemn him as a sinner above all men, as wholly and irredeemably bad, bad beyond all precedent and all parallel? Should we not, rather, confess that he was a man of like passions with ourselves, see in him the crowning instance of a sin to which we are all prone, a taint with which we are all infected, and find in his portentous career a warning that we too should take heed to our steps? If it be possible for us to "*crucify* the Son of God afresh and put Him to an open shame," must it not be possible for us to *betray* the Son of God afresh, and to pain Him anew with a perfidy as base as that of Iscariot?

I am not about to invite you to a complete and exhaustive study of the character and destiny of Judas, though such a study could hardly fail to be profoundly interesting and instructive. And, still less, shall I attempt any rehabilitation of his character and reputation. Such an attempt has often been made, though with little success. We have been told that he was mistaken rather than sinful, that his motive in betraying our Lord was a good and not a bad one. We have been assured that all he intended to do was to compel his Master to reveal Himself to Israel, to take to Himself his great power, to assert his claims and establish his kingdom on the earth. So far as I can judge, the theory is wholly untenable. We know nothing of Judas except what may be gathered from the scriptures of the New Testament. And throughout those Scrip-

tures he is represented as a traitor, and a traitor of the most sordid stamp. If we follow the authorities from which we derive all our knowledge of him, therefore, we cannot avoid the conclusion that the special and distinctive action of his life was a bad action, inspired by a bad motive. I shall make no attempt to avoid it. All I wish to do is, first, to shew you how very easily he may have disguised his true motive from himself; and, then, how even so bad an action as his by no means implies that he was altogether a bad man, and, still less, a sinner above all other sinners, but leaves him a man such as we are, with the same strange mixture of good and bad in his character, his actions, his motives. These points I hope to bring out in two discourses; the first on the Sin, and the second on the Repentance, of Iscariot.

I. For the present we have to deal only, or mainly, with his *Sin*.

The story of that sin, briefly told, is this. The Chief Priests, *i.e.*, the Sanhedrin, the supreme Jewish authority, had issued an order that if any man knew where Jesus was, he should make it known to them. Hearing of this order, Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to them and offered to lead their officers to the solitary spot to which Jesus had retired for the night, on condition that, for this service, they paid him thirty pieces of silver, *i.e.*, about £5 of our English money—the purchasing power of which, however, may have been equal to ten times as much as £5 would now procure. This is the fact with which we have to deal. And in

dealing with it, since all human actions take their complexion from the motive which prompted them, our first and main inquiry must be, *Why* did he do it? what was *the motive* of his treason?

Now to that question the Gospels give no direct answer, but only hints which we must follow out for ourselves. But of one thing we may be sure, *viz.*, that as "no man becomes base *all at once*," so neither did Judas. If there had not been much that was good and of high promise in the man, the Lord Jesus would not have called him to the ministry of the Apostleship: and if He had called him, yet why should Judas have responded to the call? No man was compelled to follow the Rabbi of Nazareth. Many who had been called by Him, and who followed Him for a time, afterward went away and walked no more with Him. That Judas listened to his call, that he left "all" to follow Jesus, that he remained true to Him when many abandoned Him, proves at least this much: that he was one of those who "waited for the Consolation of Israel," that he set a high value on the realities and promises of Religion, that he was willing to sacrifice much and to risk much in order that he might be counted worthy of a place in the kingdom of heaven and lay hold on eternal life.

It is incredible that Christ should have called any man to be an apostle who was not fitted by natural gift, and by inward bent and disposition, for that high function and office. None of the Apostles, indeed, were "perfect" when they were called, nor even, I

suppose, when they died. But we may reasonably assume that they were all men of an eminently religious temperament and disposition, that each one of them was at least capable of devoting himself to the service and ministry of the truth, and had some special gift which fitted him for that service. Nor is it difficult to see what was the special gift and bent which fitted Judas for the service of Christ,—in which, happily for us, there is room and scope for all sorts and conditions of men. For just as Peter was distinguished by his vivacity and enthusiasm, just as John was distinguished by a deep passionate love capable of flaming out into righteous indignation and burning zeal, so Judas was distinguished by a certain practical sagacity, a talent for handling affairs, a gift of management, a commercial tact and energy, in virtue of which he was chosen to be the steward, the market man, the man of business, to the large and growing family which followed Jesus whithersoever He went.

Now no aptitude, no capability, is evil in itself, though any aptitude may become an occasion, and even a fruitful source of evil. Peter's impressionable and enthusiastic nature led him into many a blunder, many a sin; so did even John's fervent love, till he learned to regulate and control it. And the gift of Judas was as perilous, but no more perilous than theirs. Every man has "the defects of his qualities;" but there was no more reason why the special gift, or quality, of Judas should land him in perdition than that of John or Peter. Few gifts, indeed, are more honourable, or more service-

able, than this faculty for transacting business, for managing affairs. It is the gift of the statesman as well as of the merchant. And though it has a danger peculiar to itself—its danger being lest the man who has it should come to measure all things by their money value, or to care too little for ought that is not of immediate and obvious utility—there is no more reason why he should yield to his special temptation, and become a mere Utilitarian, than there is for the man of high spiritual imagination to yield to *his* temptation, and sink into a mere Visionary, for ever framing almanacks of the Millennium, while permitting the more immediate affairs of life to fall into hopeless confusion.

Judas, however, did develop the special defect of his special quality, did yield to the peculiar temptation of his character and bent. Despite his piety and devotion, despite his deep and sincere interest in the coming and kingdom of the Messiah, despite his genuine attachment to the person and service of the Son of Man, he permitted himself to be mastered by that covetousness which is idolatry. "He bore the bag," and might have borne it well, better than any other of the Twelve ; but, alas, he let his very soul creep into the bag, and came at last to look at all things from that base point of view. We are not shewn the gradual and successive steps of the process ; but, towards the end of his career, we see only too plainly that this process of degradation had been going on, and how far the rust of the money-bag had eaten into his heart.

Take, as a typical instance, the scene at Bethany.

When the sister of Lazarus, yearning to express her utter devotion to Him who had raised her brother from the dead, broke her costly alabaster and poured a pound of precious spikenard on the feet of Jesus, Judas, unable to comprehend a devotion so lavish and profound, fell to calculating how much money the ointment would have fetched in the market, and cried, "Why this *waste*?" The spikenard was worth at least £12. Why was it not sold and the price of it put into the bag? Obviously, he had now reached a point at which he could no longer understand the beauty of a perfect devotion, and was fast losing his hold on the unseen realities. Nothing was worth much to him that could not be weighed in scales or expressed in figures.

The love of money—a root of all evil, and from which such an enormous evil was soon to grow for him—was beginning to master, nay, *had* mastered, the better affections and impulses of his nature, so that devotion is no longer devotion to him, but only *waste*. And yet—note this, for it is very significant—he himself is unaware of the base change which has crept over him, or, if partly conscious of it, he seeks to hide it from himself. Habits of piety and charity still cling to him. And even as he stands calculating how much the spikenard and the alabaster would have fetched in the bazaar, he dazzles and deceives himself even more than his companions with the suggestion, "Why was not this ointment sold, *and given to the poor*?" It is the poor he is thinking of, and how much less he, as almoner of the Company, will have to bestow upon them—so at least he tries to persuade himself and others.

"This he said," adds St. John (Chap. xii. 6), "not that he cared for the poor, but because he was *a thief*, and had the bag, and *stole* what was put therein." A thief, stealing from his Master and his friends, stealing from the very poor whom he affected to consider first of all, *so* low has this once good and pious man, full of capacity, full of promise, slipped down, even while following incarnate Purity and Charity! Base, and yet seeking to hide his baseness from himself under a show of mercy and religion, he had *already* betrayed his Lord in that he cheated the poor. But is that a form of betrayal singular to Judas? "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of these little ones," says the Judge eternal, "ye have done it unto *me*." And have the poor and needy never been robbed—in the higgling of the market, or in the administration of public charities—even by men who made a great show of religion?

A man animated by so base a spirit, stealing from the bag which commonly held so little, but always a little for the poor, might well sell his Master for thirty pieces of silver—less than half the sum for which Mary's spikenard might have been sold; and as he had found some excuse for condemning Mary's devotion, so also he would probably make excuse to himself for his final and crowning sin. When he began to follow Christ he had, doubtless, hoped to see Him build up a kingdom on the ruins of the Roman Empire. For Judas was not wiser than the other Apostles; and they, we know, looked for a kingdom which would dominate, if not absorb into itself, all the kingdoms of the world. And

the Lord Jesus was in no haste to disabuse them of that fond anticipation. He left the true character of his kingdom to unfold itself to them as they were able to bear it. They were not able to bear the full disclosure, it would seem, till after He had gone up on high. Even after his resurrection they still asked, "Lord, wilt thou *now* restore the kingdom unto Israel?" Nay, while He was still with them, He had often used language so ambiguous that they might well draw from it food for their hope. When, for example, they came to Him and said, "We have left all and have followed thee. What shall we have therefor?" He replied that, when He was seated on his throne, *they* should sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel; that, in the Regeneration, they should receive a hundred-fold for all they had left and lost. With his peculiar bent for affairs, his practical and calculating spirit, we may be sure that such words as these would make a deep impression on the mind of Judas. To receive "a hundred-fold, now, in this present world" would be a wonderful return indeed on his small investment. To be raised to a throne would be a very solid and substantial reward for the little he had left for Christ's sake. What better speculation than this could any man desire?

But as the months went by he saw no chance that the promise, as he read it, would be fulfilled; nay, the chances grew fewer and less. Jesus did not at all occupy Himself with cares and labours for a throne. Even when the people came to make Him a king by

force, He slipped away into a solitary place and would not take the crown they offered Him. At Jerusalem, too, He came up to feast after feast, yet seized no occasion, of which He had many, for winning popularity or displaying power. But, at last, when all hope had well-nigh expired, the auspicious moment seemed to have struck. On his way to Jerusalem Jesus had warned his disciples that great events were at hand. As He drew nigh to the City He arranged for a public and solemn entry within its gates. He rode in triumph from Bethany, through the crowded streets of Jerusalem, the multitudes casting their garments on the road, and rending the air with their Hosannahs. He passed on into the Temple, and, as one claiming Divine authority, He cleansed his Father's house, driving from it the rout of merchants and money-changers who defiled its sacred precincts. One step more, and He would have reached a throne; and Judas would have clutched his "hundred-fold." But that step Jesus would not take. He suffered the enthusiasm of the people to grow cold. He wasted precious time in discussing high moral and spiritual problems with his antagonists and his friends. Instead of setting Himself stedfastly to restore the kingdom to Israel, He solemnly assured his disciples that He must needs die; that, in place of assuming power and authority over the world, He was about to lay down his life for the world.

And now, at length, the eyes of Judas were opened. He felt that he had been duped, that he had left "all" in vain. There was to be *no* kingdom, no throne, no

hundred-fold. He, the sagacious man of affairs, had been tricked and betrayed. Was he tamely to submit to the disgrace? Not he! He would have his revenge, cost what it might. As he had been betrayed, so he would betray.

This may have been, it seems likely to have been, the secret working of Iscariot's mind. But if it were, we may be sure that it *was* secret, that he did not suffer it to come before his eyes in this bald and repulsive form. As he had hidden his covetousness from himself, so also he would hide his malignity. And it would be quite easy for him to put a fair face on the foul resolve, to conceal even from himself the sordid and malignant motive by which he was prompted to betray the Son of Man. How could *He* be the true Messiah who had cheated him with promises He never meant to keep? How could He be the true Messiah who had *not* come to set up the kingdom which all the prophets had foretold? If he were to betray Jesus, had not Jesus first of all betrayed him?

And, on the other hand, the Sanhedrin were "the power ordained of God;" they had a lawful and recognized authority. And they had commanded that if any man knew where Jesus was, he should shew it to them. Was he not bound, as a good citizen, to bow to their authority, to do what they bade? Even if the decree were unjust, the plain citizen has no right to set himself up against his rulers; his duty is to obey, and leave the responsibility with them. If the obligation were a painful one, and compelled him to betray a Master for whom,

though He had deceived him, he still cherished a lingering regard, none the less it *was* an obligation, and duty does not cease to be duty when it becomes distasteful. No doubt he might be misjudged. Men might think he had been prompted, not by duty, but by revenge or by the hope of gain. But it was not so. The thirty pieces of silver had nothing to do with it. Personal disappointment and revenge had nothing to do with it. To betray his Master for money would be base; to turn informer in order to feed a private grudge would be base; but to give up a private friend at the call of public duty, what possible baseness could there be in that?

And, after all, no great harm would come of it, even to Jesus Himself. If, contrary to all the probabilities of the case, Jesus of Nazareth should prove to be the true Messiah, the Sanhedrin would be sure to discover and recognize Him. If they did not, still they could have no power against *Him*. The betrayal would but compel Him to avow and assert Himself. And if, on the other hand, as seemed certain, Jesus should prove to be a false prophet, the members of the Sanhedrin were good men, pious men, strict observers of the law, who would not strain it against Him. Jesus, moreover, had not committed any such crime as would expose Him to the extreme penalties of the law. The most they could allege against Him would be some trivial violations of Mosaic or Rabbinical prescriptions, and some angry words aimed at the Scribes and Pharisees, who were very unpopular with the Sadducees in power. Men are not commonly

handled with severity for such slight offences as these. Probably all that would happen would be that, after a brief detention, Jesus would be commanded to offend no more. Even if the Pharisees, irritated by his rebukes, should wish to put Him to death, Caiaphas and the Sadducees were not likely to consent. And even if they did consent, the Roman law would forbid. The Jewish tribunals no longer held the power of life and death, and Pilate knew very well how to keep them within bounds. Nay, even if Pilate himself should give way, still Jesus would be in no real danger. He was the darling of the people just now; and they had the right at the approaching Feast to demand the release of "a prisoner, whom they would." No doubt they would use their privilege if there were need, and demand that Jesus of Nazareth should be released unto them.

So that, in the whole string of probable issues, there was no danger of serious harm to Jesus which even the shrewd and forecasting Judas could discern. Why, then, need he hesitate? Who could justly blame him if, moved by a sense of public duty, he crossed his private regard, to obey the command of his lawful rulers?

He must be but an indifferent student of human nature, and can know little of the subtlety of his own heart, who does not feel that under some such plausible fetches as these, Judas would easily hide, even from himself, the base greed and mortified ambition which moved him to betray his Master. I see no reason to doubt that, as he went on his way to the Sanhedrin, he persuaded

himself that he was doing a virtuous and patriotic deed, at no small sacrifice to himself. For sin takes on many colours other than its own, takes on even the colour of virtue itself; and *his* experience must have been limited indeed who has not seen lust tricked out in the pure bright liveries of love, or detected a grasping and selfish greed under the disguise of duty to a dependant family, or heard revenge boasting that it did well to be angry, and beheld it stabbing its victim under the mask and cloak of justice.

But the disguise under which Judas veiled himself from himself was soon and roughly stripped off. A night passed, the most solemn and momentous night in the history of the world. Meek and lowly, not opening his mouth, Jesus was led as a lamb to the slaughter. The Sanhedrin, the Roman governor, the very people took counsel together against Him. And when the morning broke, and the informal sentence of the night was formally ratified and pronounced, and the Saviour of mankind was led out of the city, bearing the cross on which He was to die, Judas was as a man distraught. All his calculations had broken down. The self-imposed scales fell from his eyes. He knew himself as he was, a traitor to the kindest of Masters, to the best of Men, driven on by the base lusts of greed and revenge. He casts the thirty pieces of silver from him with horror. He cries, "I have sinned, in that I have betrayed innocent blood!" All broken with remorse, he goes out and hangs himself—adding crime to crime, no doubt, and yet evincing, it may be, some touch of

grace in that very despair of himself which made life a loathsome and intolerable burden to him.

Is there anywhere a sadder story than this? the story of a man of whom it was most truly said, "Better for him that he had never been born." And yet it is a story we need to study and take to heart, lest it should prove to be our own story too. That Judas was a bad man, no one will question: but was he the worst of men? To me it seems that the Priests to whom he rushed, mad with remorse, and crying out that he was verily guilty in that he had betrayed innocent blood, were even worse than he, since they could look on his agony unmoved, and reply with a cruel inhumanity, "What is that to us? See thou to that!" Guilty as he was, Judas was at least *a man*, a good man once, a better man than most, very open to the influences and hopes of Religion, an Apostle even, with a special and eminent aptitude for the service of Christ. That such a man should gradually fall under the power of his sordid cravings and basest passions brings him near enough to us to render his example full of instruction, full of most solemn warning.

For Judas had left more than we have left, and suffered more than we have suffered, for Christ's sake and the gospel's. And he had received proofs of his sincerity, and of his acceptance with the Master, which some of us would give much to possess. Had he not been called into the kingdom by the very voice of Christ Himself, and found it in his heart to respond?

Had he not preached in the Name of Christ, and in his Name done many wonderful works? Had he not healed the sick and cast out devils? Had he not been chosen to a post of special responsibility and honour even among the Twelve? Who, then, may account himself safe if Judas might not? And yet, simply because he suffered that which was sordid and selfish in him to subdue that which was unselfish and generous, this eminent, capable, and favoured Apostle fell away from Christ, and from the life that is in Him. May not *we*, then, in like manner betray our Master, and become the children of perdition? *Do* we never sell our conscience, the Christ of the heart, our principles and convictions, our sense of right and duty, for some gain or gratification which can no more satisfy the vast desires of our souls than the thirty pieces of silver could satisfy Judas when once he held them in his hand? May not even *we* trade on our knowledge of Christ, on our religion, as he traded on his? Are there not hundreds and thousands of Iscariots to-day, whose piety is a cloak for their covetousness and for the specious treacheries of the market and the exchange? If among the Twelve whom Christ Himself had chosen, and tried, and approved, there was one who was a son of perdition, is it not only too probable that were any twelve of us taken at haphazard there would be one who was at least *capable* of a sin as vile as his?

Let us examine ourselves, then, for we too are in danger of "falling away from grace;" and he that thinketh he standeth, let him examine himself most

carefully of all, since he assuredly is nearest to a fall. And, as we examine ourselves, who will not join in the prayer? "Our Father, who art in heaven, lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil which still lurks in our hearts, lest we too betray thy Son afresh, and bring ourselves to an open shame."

XXVI.

THE SON OF LOSS.

II. THE REPENTANCE OF ISCARIOT.

“Those whom thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost but the son of loss.”—JOHN xvii. 12.

“Then Judas, who betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, I have sinned in that I betrayed innocent blood. But they said, What is that to us? See thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver into the sanctuary, and departed; and he went away and hanged himself.”—MATTHEW xxvii. 3-5.

WE considered *the sin* of Judas Iscariot a week ago. We are now to consider his *repentance*.

In our study of his most heinous sin, we saw that the man, with many lingering remnants of virtue and piety still hanging about him, had formed a habit of disguising his sins, of hiding his crimes from himself—attributing his lust for money to his love for the poor, for example. We saw, too, that he would have no great difficulty in finding some mask or excuse for his crowning sin. He may have persuaded himself that it was his duty as a citizen to obey his lawful rulers; and they

had commanded that if any man knew where Jesus was, he should shew it unto them. He may have persuaded himself that if he betrayed Jesus, Jesus had first betrayed him, by kindling in him hopes which He could not fulfil, and had never intended to fulfil. He may have persuaded himself that, after all, no great harm would come to Jesus even if He was betrayed to the rulers ; since, if He were the Christ of God, the rulers could do nothing against Him, and, if He were not the Christ, still He had done nothing worthy of death : nor had the Jewish authorities the power of life and death in their hands : nor was the Roman governor at all likely to condemn Him to death for a mere question of " words and names and of the Jewish law." Nay, even if, contrary to all probability, Pilate and the priests were to combine together against Him, still He was the darling of the hour with the people, who had just hailed Him as the promised King ; and at the approaching Feast, at which they had the privilege of demanding the release of a prisoner, " whom they would," they would be sure to demand that Jesus should be delivered unto them.

With some such flattering unction as this Judas may have stilled and quieted his uneasy soul as he went on his base and fatal errand. But no sooner has he accomplished it, no sooner is the deed done, than he discovers that, in betraying Jesus, he has most of all betrayed and deceived himself. All his calculations break down. All the disguises, which hid the true nature of the action from him, are stripped off. He sees himself as he is,

and knows that he has been moved, not by a sense of duty, but by greed, and mortified ambition, and revenge. For, indeed, our sins have the strangest trick of changing their aspect the moment they are committed. *Before*, they are full of a potent intoxicating charm, and our souls are on fire till the deed be done. *After*, they clothe themselves with terror and disgust, and we wonder at ourselves that we should ever have seen anything in them to desire.

It was into this strange and terrible experience that Judas now entered. "*When he saw what he had done,*" when his sin stood before him in its natural and unveiled hideousness, "*he repented himself.*" The juggling fiend, who had paltered with him in a double sense, abandoned him, left him to despair. Under the frightful burden he had imposed on his conscience, life became intolerable to him ; and he went out and hanged himself.

"*He repented himself.*" But was his repentance a true repentance? Not altogether true, obviously ; for there was no element of hope in it. If only, even in that dark hour, he had known Christ and could have trusted Him, he might have fought with his despair. He might have followed Him to the Cross, and flung himself at the feet of the Master whom he had betrayed. He might have sought forgiveness, and pleaded that till now he had not seen what he was doing, did not really know what he did. And if he had done that, who can doubt that even his portentous sin would have been forgiven ; that He who looks on men with other larger eyes than ours, to make allowance for us all, would have pardoned *him*

as He pardoned Peter, as He prayed his Father to pardon the very priests and rulers who had brought Him to the cross ?

But if we cannot affirm that the repentance of Iscariot was in all respects a true repentance, still less can we affirm that it was a wholly insincere and inefficacious repentance. For, even in the agony of his despair, he brought forth some "fruit meet for repentance ;" and fruit implies a root not wholly dead.

Among these fruits we may reckon these. (1) He flung from him "the wages of his iniquity." If he had betrayed Christ for the sake of silver, now that he saw what he had done, the silver lost all charm for him. He cast it from him with horror and loathing. And if repentance be "a change of mind," and a change to a wiser better mind, was it not some proof of such a change that the love of money had been driven from the mind of Judas by a superior affection ; that he now hated and flung from him as a curse that which he had loved and pursued with a supreme regard ?

(2) Again, is not the confession of sin a genuine sign of repentance ? And did not Judas publicly confess his sin ? and that to the very men who had drawn him into it ? and that, although they listened to his confession with a cold contempt more hopeless and inhuman than even the crime of Judas ? "I have sinned," he cries, in a passion and storm of contrition and remorse—"sinned in that I have betrayed innocent blood !" although he has to make his confession to men so hard and pitiless that they look on his agony untouched, and

even turn it into a jest: "What is that to us? No doubt *thou* wilt see to that." Could anything short of the profoundest sense of guilt have induced him to acknowledge his sin to men who were partakers in his guilt, and even more guilty than himself in that they had no sense of their sin, and could meet his confession with polished irony and contempt?

(3) We may find another fruit meet for repentance in the fact that Judas recognizes and proclaims the innocence of One whom he himself had delivered to death. The man who has wronged another proverbially finds it harder to forgive than he who suffered the wrong; and the heavier the wrong the more reluctant is he to admit that it had no justification. He seeks to justify himself by depreciating the character of the neighbour to whom the wrong has been done; he sets himself to think of him as badly as he can, to speak even worse of him than he thinks, that he may thus in some degree shift the burden of guilt on to other shoulders than his own. Judas, therefore, had every motive to think and speak of Jesus the worst he could. He was in the habit, too, of glossing over his sins, of inventing better motives for them than they would bear. If he *could* have found any fault in the Man Christ Jesus, and, much more, if he had seen in Him anything worthy of death, would he not have clutched at it now, and proclaimed it, that he might thus justify himself to the world? Nay, if he could have fixed on a single point in the character and life of Jesus on which to hang so much as a suspicion, would he not have dwelt on it, and exaggerated it, and

woven from it at least some thin disguise for his own perfidy and shame? We may be very sure that the Son of Man was verily innocent when it is Judas who pronounces Him innocent. And we may also be sure that there was much that was genuine in the repentance of the man who, by acknowledging the innocence of his Victim, brought the whole weight of his deed upon himself. "The instruments of darkness" who, "to win us to our harm," often throw a false colour of virtue round the sins to which they tempt us, must indeed have lost their power with Judas when, seeing what he had done, he publicly confessed that it was "*innocent blood*" which he had betrayed, and so left himself without palliation or excuse.

(4) "But," some man will object, "though he repented, he went out and hanged himself. Was *that* a sign of grace?" Not altogether, not in itself, as I have admitted; for it shews that the element of hope was lacking in his repentance; as it often is, however, *at first*, in what afterward proves to have been a very genuine and efficacious repentance. Had Judas but given himself time, had he only waited a few days, his penitence might have ripened into hope; he might have sought out the risen Lord, or the risen Lord might have sought him out, as He sought out Peter, who had sinned a sin almost as grievous as that of Iscariot; and then he would have learned what depths of mercy are in the Saviour of men. But he could not wait. Life had become a burden too heavy to be borne. And, though suicide is not itself a sign of grace, it may be a sign of

grace in the man who commits it. If Judas *could* have borne to live, if he had braved out his sin, if he had kept the thirty pieces of silver and spent them on his own lusts, or had hoarded them up for future use—should we not have justly thought even worse of him than we do? Nay, even if he had spent the wages of his iniquity in one last carousal, and then gone out and hanged himself, should we not still have thought worse of him than we do? *And can he have been the very worst of men when we can so easily conceive a worse than he?*

God forbid that we should justify him even for hanging himself; and yet we cannot but respect him the more, and think the more hopefully of him, for that hatred of himself and of his sin which would not suffer him to live. He died, died by his own hand; and that was a grave sin against the God who has “fixed his canon ’gainst self-slaughter.” But he might have done worse. He might have lived on in sin, unconscious that any strange and terrible guilt had infected his soul, folding and hugging himself in his flimsy disguises and self-deceptions, sinking ever deeper into that slough of self-righteousness which *will* not open its eyes on its own transgressions. That he had the grace to be devoured by shame, to hate himself, yes, and even to condemn himself as unfit to live—*this* surely was a sign of grace.

One of the most learned and compassionate fathers of the early Church, Origen, reports and argues for what seems to have been a not uncommon belief in those

early days ; *viz.*, that Judas was moved to hang himself by some confused thought that, beyond the veil, in the life to come, he might meet his Master once more, and cast himself at his feet confessing his guilt, and imploring pardon for his sin. That, however, is only a tradition, though surely many of us would be glad to know that it was something more. But he must be dull and hard indeed who does not feel that in that loathing of himself and of his guilt, which made life intolerable to him, there is some proof that Iscariot was not altogether sold under sin.

And, in this connection, we must not fail to note that Judas could not even wait to see the end of his perfidy. "*When he saw that Jesus was condemned*" by the Sanhedrin, when he saw Him led away, through the morning light, to the hall of the Roman governor, *then*, before the process was complete, before Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate, the sense of his guilt came pouring in upon him like a flood, and, flinging the burning silver from his hands, he rushed "anywhere, anywhere, out of the world." *Did* he wish, as Origen supposed, to run before Christ, to meet Him on the very threshold of the Hadean world, and supplicate forgiveness for his sin? We do not know. But this we know, that the very haste of the man, his prompt and instant condemnation of himself before he could have seen the full results of his iniquity, conveys the impression that it was the sin itself which he loathed and feared, rather than the consequences of his sin, whether to himself or to another.

One sign of true repentance is wanting in the repent-

ance of Iscariot, then, *viz.*, that patience of hope which is not commonly an early, but rather a late, element of contrition, a sign, or fruit, therefore, which we may fairly say he did not give himself time to develop. But four signs of true repentance are present : *viz.*, his rejection of the wages of his iniquity, his open confession of his guilt, his public testimony to the innocence of the Man whom he had betrayed, and his profound consciousness that the just wage of such a sin as his was death.

These are the facts of the case—neither extenuated nor exaggerated, I hope—as they are set before us in the Sacred Record. And to these facts, what are we to say? We may fairly say, I think, that though the repentance of Judas was not a complete and perfected repentance, it was nevertheless a very true and genuine repentance *as far as it went*, and may—nay, must—have availed him much.

“Availed him much!” you may object. “But the man was lost. How could it avail him anything?” Well, well, it *has* availed him ; it counts for something *with us*, does it not? If Judas had not repented, if the sense of his guilt had not taken the very life out of him ; if he had gone on his way with a smug face, accounting himself a virtuous but unfortunate and much misunderstood man ; if he had put the thirty pieces of silver out to an exchanger, that he might receive his own again with usury, or had spent them in buying a place as spy and informer to the Roman government ; if he had turned Pharisee, and worn the broadest of phylacteries on his forehead and the longest of fringes to his robe,

and said his prayers at the corner of the streets, and after a long and respectable life had died in the full odour of sanctity—should we not have thought him a much worse man than we do? And why should *we* think better of him for his repentance, and *God* not? Why should it count for something, for much, with *us*, and yet go for nothing with *Him*?

Do you say: "But the Scripture calls Judas 'a son of perdition;' and how can a son of perdition be saved?" It would be time enough perhaps, for me to answer that question, when you had explained to me how a son of perdition could *repent*, as St. Matthew tells us Judas did. But let me, rather, remind you that "son of perdition" means simply "son of loss," or a lost son.¹ And truly, Judas did lose himself utterly; he *was* utterly lost. But do not the selfsame Scriptures assure us that Christ came to seek and to save *the lost*; and tell us that the Prodigal Son was also a lost son, a son who had been lost but was found? If every lost son were hopelessly cut off from the Father, what hope would there have been for any one of us?

Do you remind me: "But our Lord Himself said, 'It were good for that man that he had never been born'?" I reply that that is precisely what Theology has been saying of the vast majority of the human race for the

¹ In one of his recent Lectures, indeed, Ruskin is very angry with our translators for having missed the antithesis in the words of our Lord, "Of those whom thou gavest me have I *lost* none save the Son of *Loss*," or for having wholly marred its force by substituting for "loss" the poor Latinism "perdition."

last fifteen hundred years ; so that, according to the theology I assume you for a moment to represent, Judas was only in the same category with nine-tenths, or more, of all the men who have lived and sinned since the world began. But I reply, still further, that this saying of our Lord's was a proverbial expression of pity and of blame, and must not be taken too literally or pushed too far. Read it in the letter, and why should you not read in the letter the solemn promise which Jesus addressed to Judas as one of the Twelve, "Ye shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel?" *That* was not a proverb, but a distinct and individual promise, a promise made to Judas as well as to the Eleven. And if Judas fell out of the promise by transgression, why may he not have risen out of the condemnation by repentance?

Do not misunderstand me, however. I am not vindicating Judas. *I* like him as little as you do. I am not seeking to condone or even to palliate his faults of covetousness and treachery, and the crimes to which they led him. Nor do I deny that throughout the New Testament he is spoke of in terms of reprobation which imply that a doom as strange and terrible as his sin was the inevitable consequence and reward of his sin. All I ask is that you should look at all the facts of the case, of the repentance as well as of the sin, before you frame your final verdict on him. A strange and terrible doom fell on Peter for denying Christ; "he went out and wept bitterly:" and I suppose Peter will never be quite the man he might have been had he not denied

his Lord with oaths and curses. A strange and terrible doom fell on Judas for betraying Christ ; "he went out and hanged himself : " nor do I suppose that the doom was exhausted in this world, or that Judas will ever be the man he might have been if he had not sold his Master for thirty pieces of silver. I admit his sin, and the enormity of his sin ; I admit his punishment, and that he deserves whatever may be inflicted on him : but by my very reverence for Holy Writ I am bound also to admit his repentance. And I can see no reason why his *sin* should affect his character and destiny, and his *repentance* should not. Are the promises to as many as confess their sins to be repealed, lest Judas should ever be forgiven ? If the Son of God came into the world to seek and save the lost, must He not continue to seek them "*until*," in his own gracious words, "*he find them*" ?

We are too hard in our thoughts of Judas if we hold him to have been an utterly graceless, abandoned, and irredeemable reprobate ; and, above all, we are too hard and narrow in our thoughts of Christ if we suppose even the sin of Judas to have put him for ever beyond the pale of mercy. Judas was once a babe, such as we all have been, and had a mother who loved him, and built bright hopes upon him. Probably, too, he had a father who led him to school and to synagogue, and trained him carefully in the Hebrew wisdom and piety. He shot up into a steady and thrifty young man—not addicting himself to vicious and spendthrift courses, but rather displaying a mind unusually open to religious

impressions. We can trace in him some touch of the character of his ancestor—Jacob; the same by no means infrequent combination of religious susceptibilities and aspirations with a determination to do well in the world, the same preference of crafty and subtle expedients for securing his ends over the frank and downright methods of which Esau is one type, and Peter another. Two souls, two natures were at strife in the man, as they were also in father Jacob; the one subtle, grasping, money-loving, the other keen to discern the value of things unseen and eternal and to pursue them. And for a time, as we all know, the better nature conquered. When he heard the call of Christ, all that was noble and unselfish and aspiring in the man rose up to welcome Him and to respond to his call. He was not a thief and a traitor when he became an apostle; nor when he went out into the cities and villages of Galilee, without staff or scrip, preaching the kingdom of heaven; nor when he returned to his Master rejoicing that even devils were subject unto him. Goodness, honour, devotion, self-sacrifice, were not unknown to him then. Let us remember what there was of good in him once, what there was of good in him even to the end: for no man who is capable of repentance is wholly and irredeemably bad; and let us not be over hard in our thoughts of him, nor unjust even to his tainted memory. The Mediæval Church had a legend which shews that even in those dark stern days men had glimpses of a light which many among us have not caught even yet. The legend was that, for the sake of one good and

kindly deed performed in the days of his innocency, Judas was let out of hell once in every thousand years, and allowed to cool and refresh himself amid the eternal snows of some high mountain for a whole day. But we know that, while he was still true to Christ, he must have wrought *many* good and kindly deeds ; and if he still suffers the punishment of the evil deeds he did, are we to believe that he does not also, in some mysterious way, receive the due reward of his good deeds ?

It is not for the honour of Judas that we are concerned however, but for the honour of Christ and of God. To say that, for his terrible sin, Judas is doomed to eternal sin is, as I conceive, to limit the love of God and the redeeming power of the Cross. What is *this* world that there should be salvation in none other ? or what these fleeting hours of time that, beyond them, the grace of Christ should have no charm ? To me it is rank blasphemy to say that even the sin of Judas is one which God can never forgive, which Christ would not have frankly forgiven if Judas would have accepted forgiveness. Did not the brethren of Joseph, after they had been dissuaded from killing him with their own hands, sell him for twenty pieces of silver ? Did they ever confess their guilt till their confession was wrung from them by the love of Joseph ? And yet did Joseph hesitate to forgive them ? Did not his heart yearn toward them ? Did he not weep over them with an utterable joy because he could take so gracious a revenge upon them ? Did he not plead with them to forgive themselves, beseeching them not to be grieved

nor angry with themselves, since what they meant for harm God had overruled for good? And will any man go about to persuade himself, or us, that Joseph was better than Jesus, more benign, more generous, more tender and forgiving?

Judas, who had never dreamed of slaying Christ with his own hand, did repent. Uncompelled, unconstrained even by any sign of love, he openly confessed his sin; and, since God did not punish him as he felt that he deserved, he went out and punished himself. Why, then, if Jesus be immeasurably better than Joseph, may we not hope that He has forgiven the treachery of *his* base perfidious brother, and that Judas either has been, or will be, persuaded to forgive himself?

If we take our stand on the broad instincts of humanity and the broad general teaching of Holy Writ, I think we may find even in the story of Iscariot's sin and repentance a confirmation of our hope for the worst of men; the hope that the evil which is in them will at last be overcome by the good which is in God, the good which Christ has *shewn* to be in God.

Such a hope is *not* immoral in its effects, let men say what they will, but most wholesome and invigorating. For it does not one whit detract from the force or severity of the law which binds to every sin its appropriate punishment. Who would like to suffer what Judas suffered whether on this side of the grave or the other, what he still suffers at least on this side, in the scorn and disgust and reprobation of his fellows? But while we hold the law of retribution *as* strongly as

any who differ from us,¹ we also hold it *much more* strongly; for we believe that it will be applied to *all* that is in man, to his whole character and whole round of action; to the good that is in him as well as to the evil; to the service he has rendered, whether to God or man, as well as to the disservice he has done them: that *every* deed, and not some only, must and will entail its due recompense of reward. So far from detracting from the glory of the Cross, as some falsely or mistakenly allege, we uphold and enhance its glory, by carrying it on through all worlds as well as this, through all the æons of time, instead of contracting it to man's narrow span upon the earth. And so, without assuming to pronounce any definite or final verdict on Judas, we are content to leave him in the hands of his God and ours, his *Father* and ours, sure that the Judge of all the earth will do him justice, and take his repentance into account as well as his sin, his faithful and willing service as well as his betrayal of the Master whom he had once loved and served so well.

¹ See Discourses on "Forgiveness not Impunity," "The Sanitary Order of Human Life," and "The Law of Retribution," in this Volume.

XXVII.

FEAR CAST OUT BY LOVE.

“There is no fear in love ; but perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath torment : he that feareth is not made perfect in love.”—1 JOHN iv. 18.

1. IT is almost impossible for any man, however constant and brave of spirit, to enter into long and intimate communion with Nature without feeling some touch of fear, and even of that fear which hath torment. When we wander, alone, through some vast forest or pathless desert ; when we are tossed on a raging and tumultuous sea, buffeted by fierce winds and drenched by waves which threaten to engulf us ; when, far from all shelter, the storm beats down upon us, and the lightning stabs, and the thunder peals and roars above our heads ; when we creep along the dizzy edge of a precipice where one false step would be fatal, and the stones dislodged by our feet plunge into unknown depths : whenever, in short, we stand among the wilder and grander scenes of Nature, we become aware of forces in it so vast, so potent, so irresistible, that they may well move us to

wonder and to fear. To many, no doubt, the beauty or the magnificence of the scenes on which they look proves an ample compensation for the fatigues and perils they encounter ; and in some, doubtless, the call made on their energies by every new emergency as it arrives, and the triumphant consciousness of difficulties battled with and overcome, kindle an excitement in which, for the most part, all sense of fear is lost. But the boldest man, and the man of steadiest nerve, have moments, even in their waking hours, in which a thrill of awe or terror runs through their frame ; and at night, when in their dreams they are for ever sinking in the wave, or slipping down a crevasse, or falling from a ledge, Nature takes an ample revenge on them for having steeled their heart against her threats and frowns.

There is no need to argue the point, however ; for the recognition of a something fierce, cruel, ruthless and terrible in Nature is a characteristic note of our recent literature. And, indeed, some of our ablest thinkers and writers are so impressed by it that they find it impossible to accept the world as the handiwork of a Being infinitely wise and good. The Maker of the universe, they argue, either did not foresee all the results of his creative work, all that would come of it, and so was not perfectly wise ; or, if He did, and yet had the heart to make a world so full of peril and misery, He could only be of a limited and imperfect goodness.

How, then, is this fear, which hath torment, to be cast out ? How may we come to walk amid the vast physical forces, of which we seem to be the sport, with a calm

and collected spirit? *Love* casts out fear, replies St. John, and love alone. And is not his reply confirmed by reason and experience? Do we not daily see how even the most timid and defenceless creatures grow bold in defence of the offspring they love and cherish? Do not men and women daily encounter deadly imminent risks for the love they bear each other? If, then, we would keep a composed and fearless heart when we stand face to face with Nature in her wildest and fiercest moods, we must know and believe the love of Him by whom all things were made and by whom they are controlled. So long as we conceive of heat and cold, wind and tempest, torrent and avalanche, earthquake and pestilence, as the products of forces which He either cannot or does not care to control, but leaves to work out their own will, we cannot have boldness in any day of trial; our enjoyment of the most sublime scenes will be marred by a sense of helplessness and insecurity: for what is *our* strength as measured against the forces everywhere at work around us? Our fear will only be cast out as we learn to conceive of God as a friendly and all-pervading Presence, and as ruling all things according to the good pleasure of his will. But if we love Him, and know that He loves us, *how* can we fear anything that He may do?

And have we not abundant warrant for so conceiving of Him? Even if we limit our thoughts to the natural world, which is so capable of exciting terror in the stoutest breast, yet is not this world favourable and kindly to us on the whole? Is not Nature at least much

more our friend than our enemy? Could men have subsisted, and multiplied, and replenished the earth through so many centuries, if the main forces and operations of Nature had been unpropitious and unfriendly to them? Do not even what seem to us the most fierce and cruel of its moods betray some kindness for us, and confer some benefits upon us? Do not its very storms and tempests, its rains and floods, purify the air or fertilize the earth, or brace the nerves of men and develop their courage and resources?

No doubt something—much—is still left to faith. There are some physical calamities and catastrophes in which as yet we can read no gracious intention. But, for all that, faith is no mere leap in the dark. It takes its stand on ascertained and verified facts. It argues from the known to the unknown. We see that Nature is good in the main and tends to our welfare; and we therefore infer that it is good throughout. We infer that it has larger ends of mercy and kindness to subserve than, with our limited powers and in this brief existence, we are able to grasp or can expect to grasp.

Is that unreasonable? Is it not, rather, most reasonable? Do we not judge *men* so? If, by long and wide experience, we have discovered that a man who honours us with his friendship is far better and wiser than ourselves, and that in the main, so far as we can follow him, he means kindly by us, do we suddenly lose faith in him because He does this or that which looks dubious or unkind? Do we not say, "I have proved him, and I

will trust him. He moves in a larger orbit than I do; and sometimes I cannot discern the full meaning of his acts: but for all that I will not doubt a wisdom and a goodness which I have tried, and which have never failed me in the end." And shall we be less just and generous in our construction of God than we are in construing our fellow-men? Does not *He* move through a larger orbit than we do? Can we reasonably expect to fathom all He does? If, in the main, we can see that his works in Nature are good, shall we not believe that all his works praise Him, although for the present we cannot always catch or always interpret their song? Even if they should bring us pain or death—and they can do no worse than that—may not pain be good for us, and must not death, since it happens to all, very certainly be a good and not an evil?

2. If in the natural world there is much to inspire fear, in the social world, in the life and history of man, there is a much heavier demand on faith and love. It would be obviously unreasonable to charge all the dangers and miseries of human life on God. The most copious source of these miseries is, plainly and confessedly, the selfishness and folly of man. Yet God made man, and rules over men, and is, as we profess to believe, working out the education and ultimate good of the whole race. But in our ignorance and impatience, longing to be happy before we are good, longing to see the world happy and tranquil and prosperous before its heart is changed and set on righteousness, we are apt to lament, or to resent, the miseries which men bring

on themselves and on one another, and by which God is teaching them to hate evil and to love that which is good. Angrily or sorrowfully we ask at times, "Why does not God interpose? why does He delay his coming? Why does He permit us to suffer such intolerable pains, losses, wrongs? Why does He permit our fellows to be so tortured, degraded, oppressed?" We do not see, or we are slow to see, what God's method with us is: how the wrongs of a class, or a race, are allowed to accumulate till they become intolerable because God is very patient even with bad men and gives them every possible scope for voluntary amendment, or because He would teach those whom they wrong and oppress patience, fidelity, courage; and then, when the cup of the wrongdoer is full, or those who suffer wrong are prepared for the change, the old bad system is swept away as in a moment; and so the world is made sweeter from age to age, and freedom broadens down from precedent to precedent, and the general level of human virtue and human comfort is slowly but securely raised. We do not see that from age to age men are being convinced afresh that unrighteousness is at the root of all their misery, and are gradually led into the love and pursuit of justice, kindness, mercy. *This* is God's part in the sad story, in the sad music, of humanity. He is ever making men aware of their sins, and of the sins of their fellows, by the miseries they breed, and so seeking to recover them to a better mind. And it is only as we know and respond to his love, and to this gracious intention of his

love, that we can look out on the world of men with patience and with hope. But in proportion as we grow perfect in our love for Him, through faith in his love for us and for all men, we lose all fear for ourselves and for the world at large, whatever the wrongs and miseries we have to witness or to endure. For it is worth while to bear pain, loss, wrong, if by these we and all men are being fitted for a noble, blessed, and immortal life.

No doubt in the social, as in the natural, world there is much need and scope for faith. Among the pains and wrongs which men endure there are some which do not, so far as we can see, subserve any good end. But here, again, faith is not a mere leap in the dark. It argues from the known to the unknown. In the main the history of man shews progress, improvement, ascent. We can see, when we study it on a large scale, that the great mass of our fellows are working their way upward, however slowly, from darkness to light, from bondage to freedom, from disorder and strife and misery to order, peace, comfort. And we infer—it is but reasonable to infer—that, were our view wider and our tests more accurate, we should be able to find an equally good and kind meaning in the problems by which we are still perplexed. And so, once more, our love, the love which springs from faith in the love of God—our love, when it is perfect, casts out fear.

3. But there is still another world at which we must glance, for there, too, Love and Fear are at strife. In the inner spiritual world we find more and graver cause for fear than in either the natural or the social world.

For here the sense of personal sin comes in, the sense of separation from God, of alienation from Him : and how can the soul be without the fear which hath torment so long as it feels itself cut off from the Source of all goodness and peace? Nay, even the best of us *fear* God while we love Him. We long to have Him with us, and yet we dread to find Him near us. No thoughtful man can study himself without becoming conscious of two main currents in his being ; one that carries him toward God, and another that carries him away from God. Which of us, for example, would like to die at this very moment? Yet we all profess to believe that to die would be "great gain," that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord! Nevertheless we prefer life to death ; *i.e.*, we prefer the present life, with all its imperfections, to a higher happier life. And the main reason for our preference is that we are consciously unfit to enter the immediate presence of God. The taints of sin still cleave to us, and the fear which sin breeds, the fear which is at once the consequence and the punishment of sin.

How, then, shall we cast out this fear? Only by love ; only by a more perfect love. And this more perfect love, which will enable us to trust in God and honestly desire to be with Him, can only come to us through a more perfect faith in his fatherly and redeeming love for us : for love is ever fearful until it be assured of return.

Hence it is that the Apostle John labours to assure our hearts before God, by assuring us again and again

of his most true and abiding love for us. In Verse 14 he says: "We have seen and do testify that (in his love) the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world." Then, in Verse 16, he adds: "And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us," and so have become one with Him. And then, in Verses 17 and 18, he concludes: "Herein (*i.e.*, in this union with God) is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment," and assures us that nothing but this perfected love, this sense of a completed union with God in heart and will, can cast out from our souls every tormenting doubt and fear. So that, obviously, John's loving fearlessness rests on his faith in the perfect love of God, and his faith in God's love rests on the fact that the Father has sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.

Now this phrase, "the Saviour of the world," has come to be little more than a technicality, which we use without much thought or emotion. But if we consider it, and try to recover its ancient force, we shall see that in this crowning proof of God's love for men—that He sent his Son to save them—we have the solution of all our doubts, a sovereign antidote to all our fears.

(1) For, first of all, Jesus the Saviour enters into that inner spiritual world of which I have spoken, and enters into it to save us from our sins:—not from the punishment of our sins, for *that* may often be the best and speediest way of purging us from sin, but from our sins themselves. And if that be true, if by all changes of

condition and mood, by toil and thought, by pain and loss ; if, in brief, by the whole series of outward changes and inward experiences through which we pass, God is really saving us from our sins, teaching us to hate them, compelling us to renounce them, why need we fear any of these changes and experiences ? They are all doing us good, all bringing our salvation nearer. It is our sins which quicken fear in us ; but if, in his love for us, the Father has sent the Son into this interior world of the spirit expressly to save us from our sins, and if the Son is using our sorrows and our joys, our losses and our gains, our strife and our peace, our rest and our unrest, for our salvation, so soon as we believe in God's love for us and respond to it, Love begins to cast out even this sin-bred fear, and, as our love grows perfect, it must and will cast it out wholly and for ever.

(2) Jesus the Saviour enters, moreover, into that other world of which I spoke, the social world, the world of men. God sent Him to save this world, to take away the selfishness of it ; to save men from their separations from each other, their alienations from each other ; to save them from their greed, their vanity, their ambition, their indifference to each other's welfare ; to bind class to class, and race to race, and, in St. Paul's fine phrase, to make them one new and living man in Him.

(3) And, then, so at least the Scriptures affirm, Jesus the Saviour entered into that third world of which I have spoken, the natural or physical world, to save this also. A power, an influence, emanating from Him, is

at work by which, not our bodies alone, but the whole framework of Nature is to be and is being renewed, redeemed from its bondage to vanity and corruption ; by which a new heaven and a new earth, freed from all that is dark, foul, fierce, cruel, are to be evolved from the old earth and heaven.

All this is included in the function of "the Saviour of the world." And if God has really sent his Son to do this saving and reconciling work in the natural, social, and spiritual worlds, *must* He not love us ? must He not love all men ? If we knew and believed the love He hath toward us, if we were heartily sure that his purpose in the gift of his Son was and is our personal redemption from sin, the renewal and salvation of the whole human race, and the regeneration of the physical universe ; and if, moreover, we were fully persuaded that we should live on, here or elsewhere, to see that gracious purpose accomplished, should we any longer have cause or room for fear ?

And yet St. John tells us that this is what he believed, what we ought to believe, since God means no less than this, and has proved that He means no less by sending his Son to be the Saviour of the world. Could we but know and believe it, would not our hearts, like that of the Apostle, spring up toward God with a love to which the torments of fear and doubt are unknown ? And why should we not believe in our Father's love for us ? Even in the natural world, though it be vexed with many storms, we find many proofs of that love ; and even in the history of man, though it be

stained by many sins and therefore saddened by many miseries, proofs of that love meet us on every side. But because the hope given by these worlds is obscure and dubious, God has sent his Son into them to clear them of their obscurities, to shew us what his real purpose is, to prove that his will is our salvation. While we look only on the successive stages of the process by which his redeeming purpose is being slowly wrought out, we may find much to inspire doubt and fear; but if we look to the clear revelation of his purpose in Christ Jesus our Lord, we may see the very end which that long and painful process is to secure: and, seeing the end, seeing how good it is and how large, we shall no longer complain of any of the stages by which alone it can be reached.

If any man think that he loves God more than God loves him, he knows God so little that he makes himself out better than God. If any man think that he loves the world more than God loves it, and would do more for it if he could, again he knows God so little that he makes himself out to be better than God. If we fear for ourselves, and doubt whether God will save us, we do not know and believe the love God hath toward us. If we fear for the world, and doubt whether God will save the world, again we do not know and believe the love which God has proved by sending his Son to be the Saviour of us all. So long as love is tormented by doubts and fears, it is still imperfect. It is only a perfect love which casts out fear. And by a perfect love the Apostle means, first and most of all, a perfect

persuasion of God's love for us and for all men, and a perfect response to it, such a persuasion and response as will be induced in us only as we believe from the heart that the Father sent the Son to be "the general Saviour of mankind."

XXVIII.

SPIRITUAL HUSBANDRY.

“ I planted, Apollos watered ; but God gave the increase.”

I CORINTHIANS iii. 6.

THE most common form in which one hears these words quoted is, I think, this : “ A Paul may plant, and an Apollos water ; but only God can give the increase.” Years ago they were often quoted in this form to prove that learning and eloquence are of little value, or even of no value, in the ministry of the Word ; that, though a preacher were learned as Paul and eloquent as Apollos, he would preach to no effect without the Divine blessing : and that as these gifts were of no avail apart from the blessing of God, therefore—O strange “ therefore ” !—they were of no use at all. The text is still occasionally quoted, I believe, in order to “ humble the pride ” of ministers—an intention for which, when it is sincere, ministers cannot be too grateful—in order to remind them that, however erudite they may be, and whatever their natural gifts, neither their gifts nor their erudition will of themselves enable them to command success in the great work to which they have been

called. But as a rule, I suppose, these words are now used as a humble and sincere confession of the fact that, whatever our capacities and whatever our culture may be, we can none of us, cleric or lay, do anything to purpose in the service of God without his presence, coöperation, and benediction.

In whatever connection they are used, they are true so long as they assert our dependence on God for success in our labours. In whatever connection they are used, they become false the very moment they deny a wise use of the best means to be a main condition of success, or attribute that success to anything arbitrary or capricious in the will of God. If a minister does not owe his success simply to his learning or to his eloquence, still less does he owe it simply to his ignorance or to an unversed and unaccomplished tongue. Whatever helps to make a man a wise teacher, or a good and telling speaker, will also *help* to make him an effective and successful preacher of the Word. Neither learning nor eloquence will avail him much if he lack higher qualities—a delicate sympathy with truth and righteousness, an intense love for God and man, a single-hearted devotion to spiritual ends. But I have yet to learn that a thoughtful, gifted, and cultivated man, a man who has worked hard and long to make the best of himself, is more likely to be lacking in spiritual gifts and aims than the man who has taken less pains to improve himself. The presumption is that “to him that hath, it shall be given.” The presumption is that the wise man will be the first to accept the highest wisdom, and that

the man of most gifts will be the first to value the best gifts. The presumption is that the most effective speaker will speak most effectively for God.

And, assuredly, those who think the great Lawgiver acts without law, that God grants success to those who are least likely to command success, have no right to quote St. Paul's words in favour of their strange argument. For, first, the Apostle is not here laying down a general principle ; he is simply appealing to an historical fact ; the fact that at Corinth he and Apollos had both ministered the word of the Gospel, and that God had blessed their ministry to the salvation of many souls. He neither affirms, nor denies, that men less learned ¹ than himself, or less eloquent than Apollos, would have done their work just as well as they had done it. All he affirms is that it was they who had done it, and that God had worked together with them.

And, again, if we must draw a general inference from the historical fact stated by St. Paul, let us be sure that we draw it fairly, that we really understand his words and the principle which lies behind them. Consider, then, the illustration which he employs, and which gives form to the whole Verse. Obviously, it is that of a farmer or a gardener. "One gardener plants, another waters the plants ; but only God can make their garden grow." Is that true ? Assuredly it is true. In this, as

¹ Of course in applying this epithet to St. Paul, I have in mind mainly his familiarity with all the wisdom of the *Hebrews*, Scriptural and Rabbinical, and leave the disputed question of his Classical erudition untouched.

in every, province of human activity, men, even when they have done their best, are dependent on the action and blessing of God. But is there anything capricious or arbitrary in his action? Is his benediction governed by no law? With whom does He generally act? whom does He commonly bless? Is it not the wise and skilful gardener, not the unwise and unskilled? It is quite true that even the most learned and practised gardener cannot thrive and prosper in his work without God. But would you expect many flowers or much fruit from a garden that was neither planted nor watered? And from which would you expect the choicest flowers and the finest fruit—from the garden of the man who had read much and thought much and had long practised himself in the art of the florist, or from that of the man who had read little, thought little, observed little, and “trusted to the inspiration of the moment”?

You see, the very instant you bring your common sense to bear on St. Paul’s words, all the old arbitrary interpretations of them, which detach effects from their natural causes, and substitute for them some unknown and capricious cause on which we cannot reckon, fall away from the words, and you are compelled to confess that the more able and accomplished the workman, the more likely is God to bless him in his work, whatever that work may be.

All analogy, then, conducts us to the conclusion, and all experience confirms the conclusion, that learning, intelligence, natural ability, an eloquent tongue, so far from being hindrances to the successful preaching of the

Word, are aids to it, and aids of the most valuable kind. Were the twelve men whom Jesus chose to be always with Him the least able and intelligent, think you, or the most intelligent and capable of the Disciples who accompanied with Him from the beginning? And, in the early history of the Church, who were the men who rendered the most effectual service? Which of the Disciples came to the front and *led* the Christian enterprise—the least gifted or the most gifted? Stephen, James, Peter, John, Paul, Barnabas, Apollos, Luke, Titus, Timothy—were not these men at once the most conspicuous, and the most capable, learned, and eloquent of the heroic band which, under the blessing of God, put a new heart into the world and a new face upon it? Did not God *then* choose for special honour in his service the men who could speak and write with most force and therefore with most authority? *Must* not the wise God love wise men, just as the good God loves good men? It may be doubted whether the world has ever seen a natural orator superior to St. Peter, or a logician superior to St. Paul, or a rhetorician superior to St. Apollos. As we might have expected, God chose the best instruments for the best work. And if He used these men and their gifts *then*, why should He not use, and even prefer, men of similar gifts *now*?

Learning and eloquence are great aids to the Preacher, *then*. God values and uses them in his service; and, therefore, we should prize them, and wish that all who teach and preach were possessed of them. Learning enables a man to speak with confidence and authority:

for who will not listen to the man who knows? Eloquence enables a man to speak with force and persuasiveness ; we cannot help listening to a man who, by his mastery of the arts of speech, plays upon our heart-strings and makes them yield what music he will. And these, too, are gifts of God. The natural aptitudes which make a man a scholar, or an orator, come from Him ; as do also the opportunities of culture and training by which his natural gifts are nourished and developed. To depreciate these gifts is to insult Him who gave them.

But it would be a grave mistake were we to look on these as the only, or the highest, gifts required for the work of the ministry. Much reading—albeit St. Paul bade Timothy give himself to *reading* as well as to exhortation and teaching—will not of itself make a good minister, any more than by itself it will make a good gardener. A ready flow of eloquent words, the mere gift of rhetoric, will no more make a good preacher than it will make a wise statesman or even a good orator. The gift of speech, indeed, is a hindrance, rather than a help, to a man unless he has something to say, and something worth hearing ; for mere glibness inspires distrust, not confidence or respect. And even when a man, by reading and reflection, has mastered a subject, he has done but little unless he feels the vast importance of his theme, and passionately yearns to win men to the love and obedience of the truths which he has discovered or verified. The first and chief gift of any minister of the Word is an intense faith in the

truths revealed by that Word, a profound conviction of their power and supreme importance, and a desire equally intense to press them on the acceptance of his brethren.

Thou must be true thyself,
If thou the truth would'st teach ;
Thy soul must overflow, if thou
Another's soul would reach.

Unless a gardener loved his work and was faithful to your interests, you would hardly care to put him in charge of your garden, however learned and skilful he might be. And, in like manner, you should not put your souls in the charge of any minister, however learned and eloquent, unless you are persuaded that he loves the truth, and heartily desires to see you walking in the ways of truth and righteousness. The man who plants and waters in any domain, physical or spiritual, must not only know what to plant and when to water ; he must be resolutely bent on getting from it the best and largest yield he can. But if he is possessed by this stedfast purpose and devotion, all his other gifts will be useful and welcome ; and the more he has the better both for him and for his work.

Again : Even when a gardener is devoted to his work, as well as learned and skilful in it, there are seasons when he will labour well-nigh in vain. Even in the worst times, indeed, he will make his garden do better and yield more than the man who has neither his knowledge nor his skill. But, still, there are times when even the best and wisest of men will fail. The rain, the wind,

the frost, the electrical conditions of the atmosphere—any one of them, or all of them combined, may defeat his best endeavours. And if these occasional defeats remind him that, after all, he is dependent on a Wisdom and a Power higher than his own, they are of the gravest moral value to him ; for even a gardener is apt, I suppose, to slip into the persuasion that he owes more to his art and skill than to the beneficent and growth-giving will of God, and is all the better for being reminded, by the element of uncertainty which enters into his calculations, that he owes far more to God than to any wisdom of his own. He will be slow to believe, however, that his defeats and disappointments are the result of a Divine caprice. He is sure that he owes what success he gains to his knowledge of natural laws and his skill in availing himself of them. And he will, therefore, be disposed to think that, if he knew more of those laws and was more prompt and skilful in adapting himself to them, he would escape the defeats he suffers. That is to say, he knows that he owes his general success to God, who works with him through the laws of nature ; and hence, when he fails, he does not at once or readily conclude that God is against him, that the Divine Will is bent on his ruin or discomfiture ; he, rather, concludes that the Will of God is always a good and beneficent Will, but that as yet he knows too little of it to get all the benefit from it he might.

Now if we carry that up into the spiritual region, St. Paul's illustration will read us a valuable lesson. As even the Apostles, so also the best and wisest of their

successors do not always succeed. They plant and water as well as they know how ; but God does not always give the increase. And if these occasional failures teach them that there is a mystery in spiritual, as well as in natural, growth which they have not yet mastered ; if they teach them that even in the best work they do they are dependent on the will and grace of God, then, surely, these occasional defeats are of the gravest value to them, and should make them more humble, more prayerful, more devout. But should they therefore conclude that God is capricious, that his grace is what is called "sovereign grace" in the sense of being lawless, arbitrary, not dependent on the use, or the wise use, of means ? On the contrary, like the gardener of whom I have just spoken, they should conclude that the will of God is always a good and kindly Will, a Will set for the salvation of men ; but that as yet they are not wise enough to grasp all the laws which determine its action, or not prompt and skilful enough in availing themselves of these laws. It is not less learning they want, but more ; it is not less eloquence, but an eloquence more wisely toned and devoted to higher ends.

What the will of God is in a garden or a farm, we may doubt, though I see no reason to doubt his will to be that every garden and every farm should be made to yield the most for the service of man that can be got out of it. But in the Church we cannot doubt what his will is ; for He Himself has told us that his will is the salvation of men, their salvation from all the evils that injure and debase them, into the peace of righteousness

and love. And, therefore, when we fail to save men from their bondage to lust, passion, selfishness, worldliness, or, in one word, from sin, we may be sure that that is not because He is not willing to save them, or because his will is fluctuating and capricious, but because, with all our learning, we have not learned how best to work together with Him, how best to avail ourselves of the laws and forces of his kingdom.

What the text really means, then, is not that when Paul plants, and Apollos waters, God will not give the increase, although He would have given it if some one less learned than Paul had planted, and some one less eloquent than Apollos had watered. It means, rather, that whoever plants, and whoever waters, God is always seeking to multiply the seed they sow and tend ; and that when a Paul plants, and an Apollos waters, God is more able to give the increase than when He has to work through men less able and less devoted than they. It does not mean that He is inobservant of the law which binds together cause and effect and produces the larger effects from the more efficient causes. It means, rather, that He is always observant of that law ; that his best blessing goes, and must go, with the best men ; and that, when we know more of his will and are drawn into a more perfect harmony with it, we shall none of us labour in vain or spend our strength for nought.

And now, in conclusion, if any man say : “ *We* are not ministers and preachers of the Word. What is all this to us ? ” I reply, first of all ; But you *are* ministers of the Word, and that in two senses. Every man who

has found righteousness, hope, peace, through faith in Christ, is bound to speak for Him by lip and life. There are at least some souls to whom it is his clear duty to teach the faith to which he owes all that he values most. And, again, every one of you is a public, as well as a private teacher of the Gospel ; for at this very moment you are either lending weight to my words, or taking from them, by your attention or your inattention, by the interest you shew that you feel or that you do not feel in what I am saying. It is the whole Congregation which preaches even when it is only one man that speaks ; for his words come with redoubled force when they are clothed with the sympathy and winged with the prayers of his audience.

There is a sense, then, in which you are all ministers of the Word ; for you preach with and through me. The oftener you are here, and the more attentive and devout you are when you are here, the more constantly and effectively do you proclaim the Word of Life. But there is also a sense in which you are not ministers, but only hearers of the Word. And, as hearers, it is very important you should be persuaded that, in the highest and most interior domain of the spirit, God acts by law, not by caprice ; that He works most efficiently by the most efficient instruments, does his best work by the best men, produces his larger effects from the larger causes, gets his ablest and most successful preachers out of his most thoughtful, able, and accomplished servants. Nothing would do more to extend and deepen that unhappy and unreasonable divorce between Science and

Religion which is already too common than that, while Science steadily affirms the constant reign of law, the Church should assert in her domain the incalculable play and interruption of Divine caprice. It is no small gain for us, therefore, when we can rescue and recover any text which has long been abused, by being made to assert that God's choicest spiritual gifts are bestowed without reason, without any discernible law ; when we can shew that, instead of withholding the increase when Paul plants and Apollos waters, it is precisely then that He is most sure, because most able, to give it.

And, finally, it is a very great gain when we can assure ourselves that, so far from being fickle, incalculable, capricious, God's will is always bent on our salvation ; and that this saving Will is most likely to take effect upon us when we listen earnestly to the most earnest, laborious, and accomplished expositors of that Will. Many a man has lost heart, some of *you*, I doubt not, have lost heart, on hearing that your salvation depended on "the sovereign decree" of God, that you could do nothing until He called you. True as that doctrine is in itself, it turns into a lie on many lips. For while it is quite true that we can do nothing to purpose until God calls us and unless He help us, it is equally true that He is *always* calling us, always seeking to help us. While it is quite true that nothing short of his sovereign and stedfast Will can lift our weak and fluctuating wills clean out of the evil habits and tendencies into which they have sunk, it is equally true that his Will is *for* our salvation and not against it, and

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that the very moment we will permit it to take effect, it will and must take effect upon us.

There is no one of you, therefore, who need despair ; none who need say, "I listen and wait in vain. God does not come to me. He does not care to save me. I will listen no more." God *does* care to save you. He will save you now, if you will let Him. And, as He acts by law and uses appropriate means, you are never so likely to feel the irresistible touch of his redeeming love as when, prepared and elevated by solemn acts of worship, you are listening, with a devout and longing heart, to thoughtful and earnest expositions of his Will concerning you.

Once more, then, I repeat that God's will is a good, a loving, a law-abiding Will. He longs to save you, to save you by the power of his Spirit acting through his Word. And even now, if you will but turn to Him, and act on the better impulses which are stirring within you, He will come down, and take up his abode with you, and draw your will into a pure and happy concent with his own.

XXIX.

THE STERNER PARABLES.

“For I say unto you that none of those men who were bidden shall taste of my supper.”—LUKE xiv. 24.

IN the parables of our Lord there is occasionally a touch of severity by which we are at once perplexed and pained. There are tones in his voice which we can hardly recognize as his. He seems unlike Himself—unlike our best conception of Him. He invents incidents, He utters sentences, which cross the current of the very convictions and sympathies which He Himself has quickened and confirmed within us. When, for example, we read the parable of The Sower, if we at all reflect on what we read, we cannot but feel some compassion for the men, or classes of men, represented by the hard-trodden, the rocky, and the thorny soils ; cannot but ask, Is nothing to be done to redeem and improve them? Will they never have another and a better chance? When we read the very “pearl” of parables, so long as the prodigal son is suffering, in the far country, the due reward of his deeds, our sympathies cling to him ; but no sooner does he return than we

begin to feel how natural it was that his elder brother should wonder what *he* had done that he should be preferred to himself; and though this elder brother is by no means a lovely or attractive figure, we cannot but admit that it was hard for him to stand by and see such treasures of love and bounty lavished on one who had done nothing to deserve them. And so with other parables. Do what we will, we cannot but pity the five foolish virgins, with their expiring lamps, left out in the cold; and cherish a hope that even the slothful and impudent servant who hid his lord's money, even the desperate man who was driven into the outer darkness because he lacked the wedding-garment, may be brought to a better mind.

And, at first, when we become aware of these undercurrents of pity and compassion for the *wrong* persons, and find ourselves drawn to those whom Christ seems to condemn and reject, we take ourselves to task: we suspect ourselves of a wilful and perverse temper, a temper out of tune with his, and conclude that our judgment, wherein it differs from his, must be unenlightened partial, mistaken. Yet how can that be when the more closely we examine ourselves, the more sure we grow that we derive these feelings of sympathy with the unhappy, pity for the outcast, and this craving for the salvation of the lost, from Him alone; that it is *his* spirit which moves and stirs within us when we compassionate their lot, and trust that somehow they may still be redeemed and restored?

And this conviction waxes strong and bold within us

as our knowledge widens, and our experience of the spiritual life grows more deep and full. Very probably we have ourselves passed through all the stages denoted by the four soils in the parable of The Sower : first, that of youthful pre-occupation and indifference, when the good seed of the kingdom, however lavishly scattered, could not penetrate the hard and polished surface of our character ; then, that in which we took a shallow interest in religion, strong enough, and perhaps even touched by fanaticism, while it lasted, but having no root in the depths of our character, and therefore no endurance ; then, that in which the growth of our fervent early religiousness was choked by the quick-springing and innumerable cares and toils of our outward life ; and, finally, that in which, through the grace and toil of the Divine Husbandman, his use of all the correcting conditions and experiences of our life, the hard surface has been softened, the shallow soil deepened, the thorny ground cleared, and the good seed has at last taken root in us and brought forth fruit. And if we have ourselves passed through these successive stages, how can we believe that each of them stands for a *different* class of man, whose fate is decided by his first momentary contact with the seed ? How can we believe that the hard soil cannot be softened, or the shallow soil deepened, or the thorny soil cleared, and that no one of them can ever be converted into good, honest, and fertile ground ? We must, rather, believe that the Good Husbandman not only continues to sow suitable seed year after year on all soils, but that He also ploughs up that which is hard

carts away the stones and rocks which lie on or beneath the shallow soil, burns up the briars which infest the thorny ground ; and that, with his goodwill, He will never cease from the labours of his love until every field in his farm yields its appropriate harvest.

And if our own experience sanctions the compassion and hope we feel for those whom some of the Parables seem to leave without hope, Christ Himself sanctions our sympathy with the unhappy and neglected and lost. If our sympathies go with the miserable Prodigal so long as he is absent from home, and then pass over to the elder brother when he seems neglected and disparaged, where do the Father's sympathies go ? Do not they, in like manner, run out, first, to the wild dissolute lad wasting his substance in riotous living or perishing with hunger ; and, then, to the obedient elder brother who resented the comparative indifference and neglect into which he had fallen, but whose resentment must surely have melted away before the tender gracious words, "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine" ?

If *we* pity the foolish virgins, or the slothful servant, or the unapparelled guest, can we suppose that *He* did not pity them whose heart is the very home and fount of pity, who, in his love for the disobedient, the foolish, the lost, humbled Himself to manhood and to death, and who came into the world for no other end than that He might seek and save them ?

No, we cannot suppose it. And yet his Parables occasionally point, or seem to point, in another direc-

tion. They shew us, or we think they shew us, men rejected, shut out, cast out even, from his kingdom and grace. It is this apparent contradiction between what we feel to be his Spirit in us, what we ourselves know of his grace and love, and these parabolic hints of the limitations of his love, the restriction and failure of his grace, which perplexes and pains us.

Is there no solution of this perplexity which will relieve us of our pain? Assuredly there is, and one so simple that it is amazing how any one should overlook it; one so obvious that it instantly commends itself to us, and so triumphant that it turns our very pain and distress into an ever-flowing source of joy.

The men in the Parables are not real men, men who had an actual and historical existence; they are imagined and typical men, since the parables are stories, not annals. So much we all perceive and admit the moment we think about it. But of what are these parabolic persons typical? Not surely of definite individuals, or of classes, rigidly separated from each other; but of certain spiritual stages or states, of certain ruling tempers of the soul which Christ approves or disapproves, because they promote or hinder our true welfare. For if we take them as types of different classes, the Parables simply present an insoluble problem; whereas if we take them as setting forth spiritual conditions, certain tempers of mind and conduct, we can read and understand all the Parables. Every trace of difficulty is removed from them. They are throughout in harmony with the mind and spirit of Christ. There is nothing in them which

repels us the more, the more we grow up into Him. Our mistake, the mistake which leads us to think He sometimes takes the tone of a hard and austere Master, and condemns men with a severity inconsistent with his usual grace, lies in this : we thoughtlessly assume that He is speaking of actual men, or classes of men, and read his parables as if they were history. Whereas if we remember it is *parable* that we are reading, not history or biography, and that He is speaking not of individual men, but of types of human character and condition, all becomes plain and congruous ; our Master speaks like Himself ; and the very words, which sound so stern and menacing, grow full of tender promise and grace. Where we once found judgment, we may now find benediction.

As, for example, we read the parable of The Sower, we find in it no hint, or taint, of the impossible moral often drawn from it : that *three* classes of men are rejected by God, while only *one* is chosen and accepted ; but only a gracious proclamation of the fact, that all that is hard in us must be softened, all that is shallow deepened, all that is worldly and selfish destroyed, before we can respond as we should to the toils of the prodigal Sower and patient Husbandman who is ever seeking to create in us an honest and good heart, and to make us fruitful in all good works. And when we read those other Parables of which I have spoken, and which tell of the foolish Virgins, the slothful Servant, the Guest without a wedding garment—if only we remember that it is *parable* we are reading—we find in them simply a clear enun-

ciation of the obvious and necessary exclusion of the improvident, the indolent, the wilful and self-sufficient spirit from the kingdom of Righteousness and Love, in which all are wise, all diligent, all lowly and sympathetic. We may even find in them a promise, which surely there is much in our own experience to confirm, that He who has called us into his kingdom will never rest from his work of grace until He has eradicated from our nature those selfish, slothful, and foolish dispositions and habits which render us unmeet for his service. So that, rightly read, read as parables, and as parables of the kingdom of God, even those which have seemed to us the most severe and forbidding prove to be as full of grace as of truth.

Of all these Parables, no one, I suppose, has been more cruelly misinterpreted and abused than that of The Supper, of which my text forms part ; or as we ought to call it, that of The Dinner, since it refers to the chief, the most leisurely and festive, meal of the day. We have been taught to read it, or, in our thoughtlessness, we have permitted ourselves to read it, as if it were a history breathing out threatening and doom, as if it fixed and disclosed the future destiny of large classes of men ; and not as a parable setting forth the inevitable issues of certain moods and dispositions of the soul, and bearing very much more on the present than on the future life.

Read and applied as history, it has been taken to mean that the man who had bought a farm, and would not leave it to follow Christ, stands for a large class of

his fellows who prefer their property to the service of Truth and Goodness ; and to predict that, as *he* never had another chance, so neither will *they*. The man who must needs go to prove his oxen stands for another class, who think more of the claims of business than of serving God ; and, as *he* never had another chance, so neither will *they*. And the man who had married a wife, and therefore could not accept the invitation of Christ, stands for still another class, who permit themselves to be so absorbed in earthly passions and affections that they have no heart for the love and service of God ; and, as *he*, having once refused, never had another chance, so neither will *they*. They are lost, lost for ever ; for does not Christ Himself say that none of those who were bidden, and refused his bidding, shall ever so much as taste of the supper to which they would not come !

Now I do not say that we often, or ever, draw out the moral of this parable so distinctly as this : but I confidently appeal to you whether, in thus drawing it out, I have at all exaggerated the general impression which it has left on the popular mind, and in which many of us have more or less shared. And yet, when once we reflect on it, could anything be more alien to the mind of Christ ? Are we not quite sure that it is *his* Spirit which prompts us to say that He, the Saviour of all men, and in especial the Saviour of the sinful and the lost, could never have meant *that* ?

Nay, more, could anything be more alien to our own experience ? If our experience of the spiritual life

teaches us anything, it surely teaches us that, so far from having here the representatives of three distinct classes, all of whom are for ever excluded from the kingdom of God, one and the same man might have done all that is here told of three men, and nevertheless have sat down in the kingdom at last. He who had refused the invitation of Christ, because he had just bought a farm, might afterward have bought five yoke of oxen to plow his farm with, and refused the invitation again ; might even have afterwards married a wife, to manage the dairy and be the joy of his hearth, and have refused the invitation once more. And yet, after three refusals, he might have accepted the invitation, brought his wife with him, and have been welcomed to the house and table of the Lord. For have not we, who now rejoice in the salvation and service of Christ, been guilty of these three refusals, and even of more than three ? Have not we thought more of our " belongings " than of Him, plunged into business with an eagerness which has prevented us from serving Him, and been so absorbed in the very love which ought to have brought us nearer to Him than ever as that our hearts have grown cold to Him ? Is there *no* Christian man or woman here who, even as I speak, is confessing in his or her heart : " Yes, I have been guilty of all these sins, and of more than these " ? Is there *any* Christian man or woman here who dare assert that he, or she, has never been guilty of them ? How, then, can it be true that those who have once been guilty of them can never have another chance ?

If we would but bring a little common sense to the parables of our Lord, if we would but read them in the light of our own experience of his grace, if we did but trust the impulses of his Spirit in our hearts, it would be quite impossible for us to read them in the hard literal way we do, or to draw from them, or even to assent to, the stern forbidding morals they are often assumed to inculcate. We should read them *as parables*, as pictures, as prose poems, as personifying those tempers and habits of the soul which qualify, or disqualify, us for the kingdom of God.

Read thus, even this Parable is full of grace, and of gracious warning. The great dinner to which our Lord invites us stands for that happy, that joyful and festive, communion with Him to which He is for ever urging us, to which we are called in *this* life as well as in the life to come, and in which alone our true welfare and peace are to be secured. And how can our fellowship with Him be full of peace and joy until it is complete ; until our love for Him penetrates and hallows all other loves, and transcends all earthly love ; until his service is more and dearer to us than our worldly vocation, and we learn to serve Him as we go about our daily business ; until He is more to us—a more enriching wealth, a dearer treasure—than all else that we possess, and we are able to use all our possessions in his spirit and for his service ? Any property which we cannot use, and cannot even, if need be, resign, for Him—that we may be true to Him and live by his law ; any devotion to business which prevents us from serving Him or impairs our service ;

any love, however pure, through which we do not see his love shining more warmly into our souls, and by which our love for all things good and fair is not fed and sustained, cannot but weaken, even if it does not destroy, our fellowship with Him, and therefore our rest and joy in Him. If they do not wholly keep us from his table, they must at least impair our zest for his table. We are eating that which is not the true bread of the soul, and drinking that which is not the true wine of the soul, and can only bring to his house and dinner appetites clogged, if not sated, with that which cannot satisfy us.

I am very far from saying that there is nothing severe in the teaching of Christ, nothing in his claim and call on us which is not hard to flesh and blood ; or that if we cherish our earthly appetites and affections to the end, at the cost of that which is spiritual in us and divine, we shall not suffer for it in the world to come as well as in this. We *must* suffer for it even there, and suffer as long as we persist in that miserable mistake. There *must* be a certain, and deep, severity in the teaching of Christ, answering to the severity which we find in all the conditions of human life. It cannot but be hard for us to respond to his claims on us ; for it is hard for us to respond to any call to a higher life than that of the senses. But I do say that to read this Parable as if it bore only on the future life, or as if it taught that any sin into which we fall is irrevocable and cannot be pardoned on repentance and amendment, is to misread it and to abuse it to our own hurt. For what the

Parable really teaches us is, the secret of a true, restful, and happy fellowship with Christ and with God *here*, as well as hereafter. It calls on us to render that fellowship complete, in order that it may be full of peace and joy. It bids us subordinate our earthly appetites, passions, affections to the cravings, affections and aspirations of that which is highest in us, and best, and most enduring. It commands us to consecrate our possessions, our business, our love for one another, by using and enjoying them all as from God and for God ; and even to sacrifice them if they would hold us back from Him and from our duty to Him. It encourages us to attempt this high and noble way of living by assuring us that, if we attempt it, if we respond to its call, we shall enter into and abide in our true joy, the joy of our Lord. And it graciously warns us that, so long as we suffer anything we have, or do, or love, to hold us down from this our true life, we deprive ourselves of the blessedness, the joy and peace, to which that life, and that life alone, conducts.

Practically, therefore, the effect of this Parable on us should be that, whenever we find we are growing so attached to any property we possess as that we are getting only a selfish use or enjoyment from it, are not expending it in his service, cannot leave it at his call, we set and command ourselves to renounce this base and selfish use of it, and employ it only for our own real good and the good of others : that whenever we find ourselves drawn into an excessive devotion to business pursuits, so that we have little care and energy to

bestow on the higher objects and aims of life, we refuse to enslave ourselves any longer to its claims in so far as they unfit us to pursue the best ends we have set before us, or render us untrue to our best conceptions of what life should be : that whenever we find any love for man, or woman, or child drawing us down, and impelling us to draw them down, from the love and service of God and our neighbour, we seek to purify our love for them by attaching it to that which is purest, highest, most abiding in them, and subordinate even their claim on us to the claim of that Love which has given us their love, and kindled our love for them : and, finally, that we make these sacrifices and put forth these endeavours, not reluctantly and grudgingly, but willingly and cheerfully, as those who know that they are thus promoting their own chief good and at the same time preparing themselves to render their best service at once to God and to man, while they are also entering ever more fully into that Divine fellowship in which alone the soul of man finds itself happily at home.

XXX.

THE MORAL OF THE BANNED FIG-TREE.

“ And Jesus, answering, said unto them, Have faith in God.”

MARK xi. 22.

MANY are the difficulties which cluster round this narrative, and many are the morals which have been drawn from it. But most of these difficulties are common to this and to every other exercise of miraculous power. The only difficulty special to this miracle is, that here He, who came to save and bless, bans and destroys one of the creatures He had made, and so appears to depart from the attitude of grace which He habitually sustained. Yet, to the thoughtful heart, this, surely, can be no difficulty at all. For, first, do not a thousand trees perish every year by what we call “the act of God”—swept down by storms, struck by lightning, or consumed by lightning-kindled fires? And, then, for every tree destroyed by the act of God, are not a thousand more destroyed by the act of man—to feed his hearth, to build his houses or his ships? How, then, can we grudge to the Son of God and Man this one poor fruit-tree which had ceased to bring forth fruit? If any peasant of Bethphage had

wanted it to fence his field with or to keep him warm in winter, if Herod or Pilate had simply cut it down to widen the road, we should have heard no word of complaint against them. For nothing lives to itself, or dies to itself. All things exist for their uses ; and the higher the use to which they are put the more truly do they answer the end for which they were made. And is it not a higher use to teach men than to feed them, to minister to their spiritual than to their physical wants ? Left to itself, the fig-tree could at most have yielded a few more figs, or, failing figs, a few rails or a little firewood, and then have ceased to be or to be remembered. Banned by Christ, it has become immortal, and has been put to an immortal use—living for ever in the Sacred Page, and teaching men the truth they most need to know generation after generation.

In vindicating this miracle, therefore, we need not insist on Christ's mere right to the tree, a right which He shared with every son of man. We may, rather, contend that his very "curse" was an act of grace, and lifted the tree to a higher use than but for his grace it could have attained. We may plead that He conferred immortality upon it, and an immortality of service ; that He put the last honour upon it by demanding that it should "die to live," *as He Himself was about to do*. And were we, like Professor Drummond,¹ to attribute intelligence and will to the trees and beasts of the field, we might fairly conclude that, if this fig-tree were a tree of any nobility and ambition, it could not but rejoice

¹ In *Natural Law in the Spiritual World*.

that it was counted worthy of so high a task and function as Christ imposed upon it.

What, then, was the lesson which Christ employed it to teach and to enforce? Many answers have been given to that question. Some hold that the disciples would inevitably connect this miracle with the parable of The Barren Fig-tree, and find in it a forewarning of the doom which was soon to be inflicted on the Jewish nation and church. Others hold that it was intended as a warning to the members of the Christian Church in every age, a warning against the faith which is without works. Nor would I take it on me to say that either of these warnings is illegitimate, and, still less, that either of them is unnecessary. All I would say is that, before drawing any other moral from this incident, we ought at least to accept the moral which our Lord Himself drew from it. And his moral is : *Have faith in God* ; not a warning at all, therefore, but an invitation to trust, to rely on the power and grace of Him who made all things and who rules over all.

Now this is a moral, a lesson, which lifts our hearts to another and a much higher plane of thought. Instead of listening to a warning against sin and weakness, or a rebuke of them, we are encouraged to exercise a grace by which alone our sin and weakness can be removed. It points us to the secret of Christ's power over tree and mountain, and bids us make that secret, that power, our own. In the beginning Man was crowned king over this lower world. All things were put under his feet when he was created in the image of God. That image,

lost or marred in Adam, was restored in Christ. And in proportion as, by faith in Him, we become true and complete men in Christ Jesus, we recover our original birthright ; all things are ours and work our will.

This I take to be, in general, the lesson taught by the banned and withering Fig-tree, as taught by our Lord Himself. But it is easy to put a more definite meaning into it from the context, and thus to make it bear more immediately on the common round of thought and the daily duties of life.

As they beheld this exhibition of Divine power and grace, the disciples were lost in astonishment. Dwelling on the power, rather than on the grace, which Christ had shewn, they cried, "How *soon* did the fig-tree wither away!" To recall them from mere barren astonishment, perhaps also to save them and us from finding in his act mere warnings and forebodings of doom, He fixes their thoughts on its grace and promise. "Have faith in God," He says, "and *ye* shall not only do what I have done to the fig-tree, but even if *ye* shall say to this mountain, Be thou taken up and cast into the sea, it shall come to pass." So, at least, St. Matthew reports his words, remembering mainly how they bore on those who then listened to his voice. But St. Mark so reports them as to generalize and even to universalize them, as to shew that the Lord Jesus had us and all men in his mind, as well as the eye-witnesses of his power ; for *he* makes Him say : "Have faith in God ;" for, "verily I say unto you, *Whosoever* shall say unto this mountain, Be thou taken up and cast into the sea, and shall not

doubt in his heart, but shall believe that what he saith cometh to pass, he shall have it : ” and “ *all things whatsoever* ye pray and ask for, believe that ye have received them, and ye shall have them.” So that it is not only to faith, as a general spiritual force of boundless potency and value, that our Lord directs our thoughts ; but also, and more particularly, to the faith which sees what things are useless and ready to die, and puts them out of the way ; the faith which confronts obstacles as big as solid mountains, and yet is sure that it can remove or surmount them ; the faith which faints at no difficulty, no apparent impossibility even, but attacks even the greatest of them with courage and good hope. *This* is the faith to which Christ here invites us—the faith which He Himself exercised, not only when He banned the fig-tree, but also when He set Himself to save and raise the world against its will, and had therefore to face a world in arms. It is the faith which believes truth to be stronger than error, righteousness than unrighteousness, good than evil, even though all the world should have espoused the losing cause. It is the faith which believes not only that spiritual energies are stronger than material forces, but also that the *good* spiritual forces of the universe are stronger than its evil forces, and are sure to overcome them in the end.

Nothing seems more doubtful to us at times than the victory of faith over the world ; yet nothing is more certain. The whole history of the world is one long continuous testimony to the fact, that it is by faith in great principles that men are really swayed. Mr. Wil-

son, of Clifton College, in a volume of sermons¹ which I know some of you have been reading of late, gives many illustrations of this master-fact in the history of the world, which nevertheless the world is only too apt to forget just when it most needs to bear it in mind. He points out that not only is it true in Jewish history, that it was "by faith" men "subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouth of lions;" but that in every nation, and in every age, it is the heroes of faith who have overcome the world. He cites, as examples, the three hundred Spartans who, in the pass of Thermopylæ, broke the advance of the countless Persian host; and of Socrates who, though put to death by the Greeks, nevertheless became the greatest moral force in Grecian history. He cites the good men who, both in England and America, calmly faced hatred, obloquy, and even death, that they might strike the fetters from the slave. And, of course, he might have added a thousand other illustrations from the chronicles of ancient and modern virtue. For what is the history of every great movement by which the world, or any portion of it, has been raised, purified, reformed, and renewed, but just this: Faith in some great truth or principle—faith in justice, faith in freedom, faith in wise laws and deep convictions—has grown to enthusiasm in a few hearts; and in the power of this faith they have spoken and toiled, facing and

¹ *Sermons preached in Clifton College Chapel*, by the Rev. J. M. Wilson, M.A. Mr. Wilson has many friends in Nottingham by whom this charming Volume was eagerly read.

gradually beating down all opposition, detecting signs of decay in the most venerable and solidly established institutions, customs, statutes, and dooming them to perish ; encountering whole mountains of obstacle and difficulty, yet taking them up and at last casting them into the sea.

But, of course, the great illustration of this law, the victory of faith, is to be found in the history of Christianity itself. This, indeed, is the illustration to which our Lord directs our thoughts. For "this mountain" which He promised his disciples power to remove, and which in after years they did most effectually remove, was the holy mount on which the Hebrew temple once stood, but which is now crowned with churches and a mosque. He saw that even the Jewish religion was waxing old and ready to vanish away. And yet how impossible it seemed that they, a few simple and unlettered men, with no force but their faith in Him, should achieve this mighty task. The whole world, heathen and Hebrew, was against them ; the unbroken power of Rome, the unsurpassed wisdom of the Greeks, the ancient philosophies and hereditary customs of the unchanging East, the fierce barbarism of the North, the jealous and tenacious bigotry of the Jews ; the lusts of the flesh and of the mind, the pride and splendour of life ; all to which men leaned with all the weight of habit, tradition, and inclination. And yet, in a few years, all these mighty forces went down before the power of faith ; and where they still survive, their doom is written on them in characters which it takes no prophet to read. All

this the disciples had to believe before as yet any jot of it had come to pass. Their faith in God, and in the redeeming purpose of his love, was to be their sole warrant and evidence that the temple, with all which it symbolized, was to pass away ; that " this mountain," with all its pile of sacred fabrics, all its weight of sacred memories, was to be cast into the sea ; and that the world, banded in an apparently impregnable unity against them, was nevertheless to be overcome. And in this faith they both destroyed the temple and conquered the world.

We are apt to treat these illustrations as if they were wonderful and exceptional displays of force ; whereas, in simple truth, they reveal *a law* of history, of human progress and advance. Faith in unseen principles and truths is the one great power which has raised man above the brute, and has gone far to stay or restrain the brute in man. And wherever you find that men have been raised into ampler conditions, purer customs, nobler manners, wiser laws, there you may also find, if you will, a revelation of the power of faith, and *see* that which is unfruitful perish at the command of Faith, and obstacles huge as mountains taken up and cast into the abyss.

Have faith in God, then, and in the power and the law by which He is raising and saving the world. If you have committed yourself to any good work or enterprise, expect opposition, and encounter it without fear. What is waxing old and useless must decay ; whatever impedes the progress of the world, or lies across its onward path, must disappear. Only be sure that you have

truth on your side, that your enterprise is a righteous and beneficent enterprise, and you may be sure that you have *God* on your side ; sure, therefore, that all which seems to be against you will prove to be for you. On no other terms can you labour confidently and happily at any cause. But if you are sure of final success, you will not be embittered by the opposition you meet, or hasty to snatch at a mere passing triumph. You will not yield to the temptation to employ unworthy means, by yielding to which so many advocates of causes in themselves good have brought suspicion on them and retarded, in lieu of accelerating, their advance. Unhasting, yet un-resting, you will do what you honourably can to promote it, and leave the final issue with Him who has the world in charge, and will not suffer any cause which ought to succeed to fail.

But it is mainly, I think, in the conduct of our individual life, in the formation of our inward character and bent, that we need to bear in mind the injunction, "Have faith in God." For you may be sure of this, that it is by bringing to it the influence of a good, a noble and generous, character that you will best promote any good cause you have at heart. No noble enterprise was ever furthered by ignoble means, or really served and promoted by men of an ignoble character. The largest contribution to the welfare and progress of the world that we can any of us make is to bring to its service a manly and generous nature, a mind illuminated by reason, a heart rich in virtue, a spirit steeped in faith. We *do* good most effectively by *being* good, good with

the goodness which is fed from an unfailing and eternal Spring.

Have faith in God, then, however poor and slender your conception of Him may be. If as yet you can only be sure that in loving truth, in breathing an unselfish and an unworldly spirit, in being just and shewing kindness, you serve Him,—have faith in that. Be true to your convictions, and, in being true to them, they will of necessity grow wider and clearer. But if you know God as He is, if you believe Him, *i.e.*, to be Love, to care for all men, to be set on redeeming them out of all their sins and miseries, if you not only trust that *somehow* good will be the final goal of ill, but are so happy as to believe that, by the revelation of his love in Christ Jesus our Lord, God will at last draw all men to Himself,—how much have you on which to lean, how much on which to repose! how quietly and joyfully may you go about your daily work; how confident you may be that all is well, and that all is moving on, surely, if slowly, to something better still.

Finally, have faith in God *for yourselves*, as well as for the world at large. There is no kind of fear by which we are more commonly daunted, by which we are more constantly trammelled and impeded in every good work, than the fear that, despite all our aspirations and endeavours, we are making no progress in the Christian life, or none worth taking into account. And, of course, we may have only too good ground for such a fear in our spiritual poverty and impotence. We may be relying on certain changes which once took place in us, or on

certain religious formulas which we swallowed long ago, or on certain notable and pungent religious experiences through which we long since passed. Or we may be looking on religion as something apart from our daily conduct—as a creed to be held, or as sacraments to be observed, or as a sectarian cause or temper to be maintained ; and hence we may be making no serious and stedfast effort to bring the whole round of our thoughts, affections, actions under law to God. In any such case we have only too much cause for fear. But, in any such case also, we are of all men the least likely to be haunted by fear and self-distrust. For those who think *thus* of Religion are the most easily satisfied of men. Their ideal being so low, so base, so imperfect, it is not hard to attain it. And, having attained it, they are only too apt to account themselves already perfect, and to find no reason, whether in themselves or their religion, why, forgetting that which is behind, they should press forward to that which is before them. If you *are* tormented by fear, shame, self-distrust, therefore, the probability is that you are of those in whom love should cast out fear. If you are still repenting of sins which you never feel that you have conquered, and still aiming at a life far higher than any you have achieved, and which you hardly hope that you shall ever achieve, this of itself is a proof that your standard is higher, your ideal loftier, than that of those who are content with themselves and their attainments ; it is a proof that you are alive, sensitively alive, not dead, and that you have made greater progress than you know. You have not only been raised from death

to life ; you have also been quickened into a life which is ever urging you on to new endeavours after obedience, to new heights of service and achievement.

Have faith in God, then, and in his purpose to redeem you from all your sins, and to make you perfect in virtue and holiness. Even though your sins and infirmities should swell as into mountains, and you think of them as an insurmountable barrier between you and all perfection, Faith can take up even these mountains and cast them into the sea : for your faith stands not in yourselves, but in God, in the love, and in the redeeming and renewing purpose of the love, which He has revealed. Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, "Therefore I say unto you, all things whatsoever ye pray and ask for, believe that ye have received them, and ye shall have them ;" and remember especially that suggestive and invaluable phrase, "believe that ye *have* received them" even when, and before, you ask them. For, indeed, the common blessings of life and salvation are already provided for us all, and open to us all as soon as we are willing to accept them. Why should we be haunted and oppressed by this cleaving sense of sin ? Christ long since took away our sins, and has Himself assured us that they shall never more be mentioned against us. Why should we doubt whether we shall ever become perfect in righteousness and love, when his righteousness is offered us, and his love is being shed abroad in our hearts, and his promise stands fast that, if we seek them, they can in no wise fail to be ours ?

We *have* received that which we seek and ask. For

which of us is not conscious in himself of a deeper perception and love of righteousness than he can quite act out? Which of us is not sensible of much devotion to God and goodness, and many kindly emotions toward his neighbours, which as yet he cannot adequately express, although he is always trying to express them? It is not so much more gifts that we need, as grace to appropriate the gifts we have already received more fully, to *use* them and turn them to better account. Have faith in God, then. Accept these inward gifts which you so imperfectly use as proofs that He will yet teach you to use them more perfectly. For, then, even mountains will be removed from your path, and all the hindrances which obstruct your life will give way before the onset of the faith which He has quickened in your hearts.

XXXI.

DAVID'S FRIEND.

“Jonathan, Saul’s son, delighted much in David.”

1 SAMUEL xix. 2.

IN king Saul we have a noble specimen of the natural man. He is tall, brave, strong ; and if he is also wild and moody, passionate and revengeful, there is a strain of generosity, and even of tenderness, in his character which goes far to redeem him in our eyes.

Nor was this natural man far from becoming a spiritual man. No sooner is he anointed king over Israel than a profound sense of his responsibility takes possession of him. His adventurous spirit is sobered ; a strange awe falls upon him. Conscious of his own weakness, of his insufficiency for the great part he has to play, he feels his need of a Divine help. The words and songs of the prophets come home to him with new power. He proposes to be, he feels that he is, another and a better man. The rapture of worship rises into ecstasy, and he joins the prophetic company and takes their songs on his lips.¹ He will walk by the Divine

¹ 1 Samuel x. 6, 7 ; 9, 10.

rule, and be the guide and exemplar of his people, as well as their ruler and captain. This susceptibility to the influences of Religion never quite left him, indeed, although at last it bent itself to the base uses of witchcraft and superstition.

The struggle between his higher and lower natures, between the spiritual and carnal in him, is summed up by the Sacred Historian, who saw God in all things, in the two pregnant phrases: "The Spirit of the Lord came upon him;" and, "An evil spirit from the Lord troubled him" so soon as he had finally broken away from the Divine counsels and restraints. But this inward strife of good with evil went on within him from the first; and, though it is nowhere minutely described, we are made to feel, from the first, that Saul is what the French call a "fatal" man, *i.e.*, a doomed man, a man over whom there hangs a fatality which he will not be able to escape. We see that there is a kind of madness in his blood which must break out.

It is this sense of overhanging doom which makes his figure so tragic to us; for, if the essence of tragedy be, as we are taught, "the conflict of character with fate," where shall we find a more tragic figure than that of Saul, albeit his fate was largely self-provoked?

It only deepens the tragedy that, ere long, Saul himself becomes aware of his doom, and yet pitifully strives against it, and tries to veil it, if not from himself, at least from his people. No sooner does Samuel inform him that, because he has rejected the word of the Lord,

the Lord has rejected him from being king, and given the kingdom to a neighbour of his who is better than he,¹ than Saul passionately entreats forgiveness, and even lays so rough and detaining a grasp on the Prophet's robe that it is rent in twain. Even when he bows to his doom, he would fain keep the terrible secret to himself, and begs that the Prophet will at least continue to honour him "before the elders of his people and before Israel." And, no doubt, it was this same terrible secret which afterwards drove him to madness, and to that treacherous and unrelenting pursuit of David—the neighbour better than himself and therefore preferred before himself—which is the most damning spot on a character not naturally ignoble. The man was at odds, at war, with himself, and therefore at war with all about him. In his frantic endeavours to escape from the doom he felt to be closing over him, and from which he knew, by a secret but sure presentiment, that he could not escape, he was "transported from himself;" and one of the bravest of men sank into a cowardly assassin, fiercely hating one who dearly loved him, seeking the life of one who had spared his life again and again, requiting the priceless services of David with the most monstrous ingratitude, and even, in violation of the most sovereign instinct of Eastern hospitality, hurling his javelin at the unarmed breast of one who had "eaten his salt" and sat at his board.

None the less Saul moves through the sacred story a charmed and sacred figure, retaining some touch of

¹ 1 Samuel xv. 24-31.

his original greatness and nobility to the last. Under no provocation will David lift his hand against him, nor Jonathan forsake him. And when he falls, David's elegy is only less tender and pathetic over him than over Jonathan his friend.

How came Jonathan to be so unlike his father—so unselfish, so patient, so loyal? His devotion to David may seem, to the young and unreflecting, a sign of weakness. They may assume, they often do assume, that there was something feminine, if not effeminate, in the temperament of one who could so easily resign a throne. And I am far from denying that there is a tender and womanly strain in all the best men, as there is also a manly strain, a strain of courage, in all true and noble women. But before we condemn Jonathan as effeminate, let us remember that it is always the noblest who love most nobly, and that there is no tenderness like that of the strong. To be unselfish, in honour to prefer one another, is obviously harder than to be selfish and to assert one's own claim to honour.

Nor is there anything in the Sacred Record which lends the slightest countenance to the assumption that Jonathan was a weakling, or that his passion for David was the mere folly of thoughtless youth, flinging away a crown to indulge a caprice. On the contrary, so far as we can recover the dubious chronology of the time, he was more than thirty years of age before he set eyes on David; and his love for him must therefore have been the mature and deliberate election of manhood.

He was brave to a fault, and had distinguished himself in the most perilous enterprises. He was one of the fleetest runners and boldest cragsmen in all Israel. He was the most expert archer of a tribe of archers; and his bow, "which turned not back" from any odds, was as inseparable from him as was the spear, or "javelin," from Saul. As a commander he had shewn more coolness and sagacity, and not less courage, than his father. One or two of his exploits indeed—as, for instance, that of Michmash¹—were of an almost incredible temerity.

In fine, we meet with no more manly, athletic, and chivalrous figure in the Old Testament history than that of Jonathan. And yet *this* was the man who hailed David as his future king, and, in token of his submission, arrayed the stripling shepherd in his own princely mantle, and gave him his arms and armour, down even to the celebrated bow which had wrought such havoc among the enemies of Israel.²

Why did he do it? Not simply because he was smitten with the charm of David's person and character; though doubtless he felt *that*, as did every one else who saw the beautiful poet soul shining through his "fair eyes" and comely winning face. There are other and less costly ways of shewing such an affection as this. But he may have subordinated himself to David, in part, out of sheer loyalty to his friend, and in a humble, loving admiration of his superior gifts. For the man was loyal to the very core. He was as true—a point

¹ 1 Samuel xiv. 1-18.

² Ibid. xviii. 4.

often overlooked, though very suggestive—to his father as he was to his friend. And Saul had not been a tender father to him ; or, at best, his tenderness had often broken into fierce and sullen moods. In these moods he had spurned Jonathan for the noble friendship and generous devotion which have made his name a praise in the earth. He had hurled his javelin at him with murderous intent, as at David. He had even loaded the memory of Jonathan's mother with foul and infamous reproaches, so that Jonathan strode from his presence "in fierce anger," lest he too should be tempted to forget himself.¹ And yet this brave prince was true and loyal to his father to the end—following *him*, though we may well suppose he would far rather have gone after David, allying himself with what he knew to be a doomed and losing cause, fighting with and for him, and at last dying with him and for him in the fatal conflict of Gilboa : insomuch that in his Elegy² David, forgetting all the father's faults and wrongs, remembering only the loyalty and love of the son, exclaims, "Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided."

"The soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and he loved him as his own soul ;" yet he did not *indulge* his love for David. "Jonathan, Saul's son, delighted much in David ;" yet he did not throw in his lot with that of the man he loved. In him love conquered self-love and ambition ; but even love itself was ruled by duty, and yielded to the sacred claims of his

¹ 1 Samuel xx. 30-34.

² 2 Samuel i. 17-27.

father and his king. True to David, he could not be untrue to Saul.

For—and here, I think, we reach the true secret of this noble character—in Jonathan both love and duty were ruled and sustained by piety. The will of God was his supreme law. It was his deference to that high and kindly Will which made him so true at once to his father and to his friend, which induced him first to sacrifice his own claim to the throne, and then to subordinate his love for David to Saul's claim on his loyalty as a subject, his duty as a son. Both these sacrifices must have been hard to flesh and blood. Jonathan could not but have been aware that the people loved him, and looked on him as the destined successor of Saul.¹ He could not but be aware that he had that in him which would have made him a nobler, a far better, king than Saul—more patient and self-restrained, more thoughtful for the welfare of his subjects, more obedient to the Divine will. Nor can we suppose that he resigned this lofty and alluring prospect without an effort or a pang. But he knew that God had chosen David for the throne ; he confessed it in the words, “ Fear not, for the hand of Saul my father shall not find thee, and thou shalt be king over Israel ; and this also Saul my father knoweth.” And because the will of God was his law, he was content to be next unto David, and only stipulated : “ If I live, shew me the kindness of the Lord ; and if I die, cut not off thy kindness from my house when the Lord hath cut off all thine enemies from the face of the

¹ 1 Samuel xiv. 45 ; xx. 31.

earth." ¹ So perfect was his submission that he bore no grudge to the man who was preferred before him and placed above him, but, as we are told again and again, "loved him as his own soul."

Even this, noble as it was, may not have been his most noble and heroic self-conquest. For a perfect friendship, a passionate love and admiration such as his, is apt to conclude that, having sacrificed all for love, it may at least give free scope to that love. It is apt to assume that such a love has rights which may be allowed to override all other claims. But even this indulgence Jonathan is called upon to resign. He must separate himself as from "his own soul." He cannot follow David, much as he loves him. He can only stand by while David is "hunted like a partridge on the mountains." For if God has chosen David rather than himself to sit on the throne in future years, it is also the will of God that for the present, and as long as he lives, Saul shall be king. His first duty, therefore, is to his king, to his father. And he, who had already subordinated his natural and honourable ambition to the claims of love, must now subordinate love itself to the claims of duty.

Surely brave man never had a more difficult task ; and never won a more splendid victory, if "greater is he that ruleth his own spirit than he that taketh a city." Task and victory would alike have been impossible but for his faith in an overruling Will which shapes all men's ends for them, and shapes them all for the best. Religion

¹ 1 Samuel xx. 14, 15 (*Heb.*)

is at once the very soul of all pure love and of all noble duty ; of the love which conquers self-love, however pure and refined it may be ; and of the duty which bows even the most passionate and generous love to its yoke.

Jonathan stands before us, then, as the type of noble and heroic friendship, of pure and disinterested love. And if, as we contemplate him, any of us are tempted to say, "Alas, there are no such men now !" or, "Would that I had such a friend as he !" we need to be reminded that these sighing exclamations commonly issue from the lips of men who are thinking mainly of what *they* should gain by such a friendship, and so prove themselves to be utterly unworthy of it. We need to be reminded that the wish which his noble example should prompt is not, "Would that I *had* such a friend !" but, "Would that I could *be* such a friend as Jonathan !"

Lives of great men all remind us
We may make *our* lives sublime.

And if we would share in the sublimity of Jonathan's friendship for David, we must take the steep and difficult path he trod, the path of self-sacrifice : nay, we must even learn to forego the *joys* of self-sacrifice at the command of duty. Love is not so rare as the world assumes it to be. Most of us have felt its gracious constraints at some period of our lives, and have been ready to count the world well lost if only we could win the love we craved, and gratify the love we cherished. But what *is* rare, and as noble as rare, is to hold even love

itself, or its gratification, subordinate to the claims of duty. "Thy love to me was wonderful," says David of Jonathan, "passing the love of women;" and yet Jonathan refused to gratify that love and to cast in his lot with that of David. Old ties were not to be broken, or ignored because new ties had been formed. Old duties were not to be neglected because of the duties created by a new affection. If he owed much to his friend, he also owed much to his father and king. And, difficult as it was, Jonathan contrived to reconcile both duties, to be true to both affections.

It is a lesson which we all, and especially the young, need to lay to heart. Love *has* its duties, has its *claims*. But, however pure and passionate it may be, there are other claims which even love has no right to override. It has not always even the highest claim. Duty stands higher than love, and may forbid the indulgence of love. No love can be more pure, more disinterested, more self-sacrificing than that of Jonathan for David; and yet it was not David, but Saul, for whom he lived and died. And if his victory over self counts for much with us, his victory over the cravings and impulses of love stands for more. It is this which adds the last and perfecting touch to his heroic character.

No doubt there are times in which love should stand first with us, in which it has the supreme claim, and can prove itself to be the supreme duty. Love is not to be daunted by every difficulty, nor to yield either to every suggestion of prudence or to any unreasonable caprice. But let not those who are divided between the claims of

love and the sense of duty too hastily assume that duty must be sacrificed to love. Duty, if it be real, should stand first, though all that calls itself duty is not deserving of the name any more than all that calls itself love : and to indulge love at the cost of duty is only too likely to be the death of love in the end ; for when the first fever of delight is passed, the voice of duty, hushed for a time, is sure to make itself heard, to speak in louder and more authoritative tones, and to induce a miserable conflict in the heart, in which all delight will be lost.

But if our love is to be pure, if it is to be of so high a strain that it will not sin against duty ; if love is to conquer self, and duty is to conquer love, the will of God must be our supreme law. We must be devoted to Him who made us capable of both love and duty, and who alone can teach us how to reconcile their claims when they are in conflict with each other. I do not say that “mere *natural* piety” will not induce a pure unselfish love, or teach men to deny love the indulgence it craves if a higher duty stand in the way. I do not even like to call it “*mere* natural piety ;” for all piety, as all love and duty, is the gift of God. But I do say that Jonathan would have found it much harder, and might have found it quite impossible, either to love a successful rival to the throne “as his own soul,” or to sacrifice his “delight” in David to his duty to Saul, if he had not believed in God, if he could not have rested in the wisdom and kindness of the Will which had appointed him the lower place and a duty not delightful

to him. I do say that whether in the conflict between love and selfishness, or between love and duty, no man can be sure of himself, or sure of victory, if, beyond all selfish delights and all the delights of love, he does not delight himself in God.

XXXII.

THE FRIEND OF JESUS.

“ Our friend Lazarus.”—JOHN xi. 11.

THE Greek language, which, in some respects, is a more flexible, delicate, and precise instrument of expression than our mother-tongue, has two words for that ruling affection of the soul for which we have only one. Whatever the phase or quality of the affection we have in view, we can only express it by the verb “to love ;” but the Greek could at least choose between two verbs one of which (*ἀγαπᾶν*) denoted love in general, while the other (*φιλεῖν*) denoted the special and warmer love we bear to our friends. And this distinction, though we cannot express it in a single word, marks a sufficiently broad and obvious fact in human experience. For we all know that, in addition to the love we owe to all men, there is a special love due to our friends. We all know that, however sincere and deep the affection we have trained ourselves to feel and shew for all that wear the form of man, there is a very special and close affection which even the best of men can only feel for those who recognize it and respond to it.

For this difference in the quality of our love is not contingent, but necessary and inevitable. It does not lie in the power of our will; it springs from the very constitution of our nature. We may, indeed, love, and we are bound to love all men, to cherish for them a benevolent regard which will constrain us to consider their interests, minister to their needs, contribute to their welfare, promote their happiness; but, do what we will, we cannot love all men as we love those whom we know and who know us, who sympathize with our aims, respond to our touch. Nor are we *bound* to love all men as we love those who are spiritually akin to us. That would be an impossibility, and God does not demand impossibilities of us. So far from demanding this impossibility of us, God has warranted and consecrated these two kinds of love in us by revealing Himself to us, and, in Himself, both the universal love for all, and a special love, full of repose and delight, for those whom He deigns to call his friends.

Christ was the express image of his person, and the very brightness of his glory, *i.e.*, the very effulgence of his love: and did not He, who loved us all, nevertheless call Lazarus his friend? It is both curious and instructive to observe how exactly and emphatically this distinction between love in general and friendly love in particular is recognized and sanctioned in the very structure of the Sacred Narrative. When the Sisters of Bethany send word to Jesus of their brother's illness, they say, "Lord, behold, he whom thou *lovest* is sick," using the verb (*φίλεις*), which means he whom thou

lovest *as a friend* (John xi. 3). When, however, we read in Verse 5, "Now Jesus *loved* Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus," the friendly verb, is no longer employed, but only that (*ἡγάπα*) which denotes a general affection or love. And that, probably, is because Martha's name stands first in the sentence ; for though she both trusted and liked Jesus, and was always both glad and proud to have Him at her table or in her house, she did not understand Him as Mary and Lazarus did ; she did not recognize his lofty spiritual aims and sympathize with them, as they did : and hence she could not be so much his friend. But no sooner does our Lord have occasion to speak of her brother (John xi. 11) than He calls him "*our friend*" (*ὁ φίλος ἡμῶν*). And when He comes to the grave of Lazarus, and weeps with the weeping crowd, even the Jews exclaim, "How much He *loved* him !" employing the verb (*ἐφίλει*), which implies, How much He was his *friend*. We cannot, therefore, mark the structure of the narrative without finding in it indications both of the general and of the particular love of which I have spoken. Christ loves all men, loves them so well that He will even die for them. And yet He has, and cannot but have, a special and friendly affection for those who share his thoughts, and are in sympathy with his aims, and respond most frankly and intimately to his love.

We know very little of Lazarus, though much has been conjectured about him. He has been identified with the rich young Ruler who came running and kneeling to Christ, and asking, "What must I do to inherit

eternal life?" and with the poor sick beggar of the Parable who lay at the gate of Dives and fed on the crumbs that fell from his table; with the Young Man in the costly linen robe who fled, naked, from the grasp of the soldiers on the night of the Betrayal, and even with Simon, the leprous Pharisee, who asked Jesus to his table, but gave Him no kiss of welcome, no water with which to wash his feet, no oil with which to anoint his head. All this, however, is pure conjecture, and, for the most part, very improbable conjecture. The simple truth is that we know hardly anything of Lazarus except that he was the brother of Martha and Mary, and the friend of Jesus. But though we knew absolutely nothing of him save that Jesus called him "friend," would not that be enough? What higher honour, what diviner blessedness, could be conferred on any man than this?

And how much He was his friend we may infer, I think, from the task, the sacrifice, which Christ imposed upon him. For who but a dear and close friend could He have asked to forsake the peace and joys of Paradise in order to prove that He Himself was the Resurrection and the Life? True, He only asked Lazarus to do what He had done Himself? But how sure He must have been of his man, how sure of his friend, how sure that he would understand Him and willingly endure loss and pain for his sake, before He could ask him to resign, even for a few weeks or years, the security and blessedness of his home on high! That was a great demand to make, if it was also a great honour to confer: and of whom could He make such a demand but of a friend

who would comprehend and appreciate it, and find his joy in doing another's will rather than his own, in living for another rather than for himself?

There is a wonderful glimpse into the secrets of the world to come and of its vital relation to this world, and in that glimpse a wonderful consolation for those who need to be comforted concerning their dead, in the fact that our Lord should speak so simply and naturally of Lazarus as "our friend" *after* he had died; for He could not have done that had the ties of love been broken or interrupted by death. But this is a point to which I refer only to note its implication that the man Christ Jesus had other friends than Lazarus, and that Lazarus had other friends than Jesus. "*Our* friend"—yours as well as mine; by this word our Lord associates his disciples with Himself in his very friendships. They must have been his friends, or they would not have had a common friend with Him. And, indeed, within a few days, the Lord Jesus drew out his implication in the plain words, "Henceforth I call you not servants, but friends; for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth" (John xv. 15). They *did* know both their Lord and what He was doing. They had that quick understanding of what He was and meant, and that close keen sympathy with his work and aims, which constitute true friendship. They trusted Him even when they could not take his meaning; they loved Him even when He disappointed their hopes. They were, it is true, far from being either perfect men or perfect friends; for they often misunderstood Him, and sometimes they

were both perplexed and pained by the course He took. But as compared with the world around them, as compared even with the bulk of his followers, the Twelve were his true friends. They felt his attraction, his charm, more strongly. They had a deeper apprehension of the truths He taught, and of the work He came to do. They responded more heartily to his claim on them. They left much to follow Him. And, despite the cowardice which prompted them to forsake Him in the hour of darkness, they were ready to die, or even to live, for Him. He was enshrined in their very hearts, albeit their hearts were somewhat fickle and unstable, as the Teacher, Lover, and Saviour of men. To lose Him, or their faith in Him, was far more, and far worse, than death. It was to have the very Light of their life turned into darkness. And when, by the eclipse of death, that Light seemed turned to darkness, they have themselves told us how great was that darkness—a darkness so great, so blinding, so intolerable as to render them untrue to themselves no less than to Him. In fine, He was so much to them, and they were so sincerely his friends, that, had they to themselves been true, they could not have been untrue to Him. And, being his friends, they were also the friends of God. Even this last and highest honour was not denied them; for when our Lord assures them (John xvi. 27), “The Father Himself *loveth* you because ye have *loved* Me,” He uses the verb (*φιλεῖ*) which makes Him mean, “My Father Himself loves you *as his friends*, because you have proved yourselves *friends* to me.”

Lazarus was his friend, then ; and the Twelve were his friends : and in the Twelve there were Three who were nearer and dearer than the rest, simply because they understood Him better and were more in sympathy with his spirit and his aims.

On the same terms even *we* may be his friends, and in the inner circle of his friends. Whether we love Him or not, He loves us ; for He loves all men, even his enemies. But to be loved although an enemy is one thing, and to be loved as a friend, another. His love can never be, at least it can never seem, a friendly love to us until we in some measure understand what He is doing with us and aiming at for us, what He would have us be and do, until we adopt his ideal and pursue it. If *we* are bent on mere enjoyment or success, for example, and *He* is bent on making us wise and good and kind—as He is—we are out of touch, out of sympathy, with Him. His aim for us is not our aim for ourselves. Yet, simply because He loves us, and must therefore desire the best for us and demand the best of us, He cannot give up his aim for us and adopt ours. He can only urge and constrain us to give up ours and adopt his. And when He urges and constrains us, when He crosses our aim, when He refuses us the wealth, or the pleasure, or the success, on which we have set our hearts, that He may fit us for a higher and more enduring joy, a wealth over which time and change have no power, and a success to which even death is no term or check, how, till we have learned our lesson, can we feel that He is proving Himself our friend and shewing how truly He loves

us? Before we can do that, we must enter with some degree of intelligence into his plan for us, his aim; we must be persuaded that his aim, his plan, is better than our own: we must be at least trying to make it our own. Till then, we may count Him an enemy when He most shews Himself our friend, and mistake his very love for alienation and displeasure.

We know how children sometimes mistake their father's wisdom for folly, simply because it is so much larger than their own and looks so much further ahead; and his love for unkindness, simply because it is so much deeper and more patient than their own, and is aiming at better things for them than they can yet comprehend. But we know also that, if they are good children, they not only submit to his will, but trust in his love—trust that what looks so foolish to them will prove to be wise, and that he is really and most kindly seeking their welfare even when He disappoints them most. And it is thus between friends, especially when one is confessedly much wiser and better than the other.

For friendship, though one in kind, is of many degrees. There is always, I think, a certain mystic touch in true friendship, always something in it which we cannot quite explain. This man *suits* me; he is congenial to me: I like him and he likes me. I am at ease in his company. I can be myself, and perhaps my best and happiest self, when I am with him. And yet, if you ask me why, I cannot always tell you, or cannot tell you adequately and fully. Sometimes I like him

because he is like, and sometimes because he is different from, myself ; sometimes because he is what I want to be, and I can see my own ideal of character more generously or more genially developed in him, and sometimes because he holds up before me another, if not a higher, ideal ; sometimes because I can look up to him for guidance, sympathy, help, and sometimes because he looks up to me ; sometimes because I always find him the same and can therefore rely upon him, and sometimes because he is full of surprises and keeps expectation on the stretch. In short, there is no end to the reasons why men and women feel the special attraction and the special affection for each other, and the special comfort and repose in each other, which we call friendship, and which the Greeks called friendly love. And yet, though we can see so many reasons for it, we are conscious that the most potent reasons for it are the most subtle, and are often hidden in depths of personality, or idiosyncrasy, which we cannot sound.

But of this we may be sure, that it occupies many planes, and that its quality varies with the plane on which it rests, along which it moves. Thus, for instance, there may be a very honest and sincere friendship, so far as it goes, between two persons who are drawn to each other mainly by their looks, because they find each other agreeable to the eye and the touch, or because they hold certain tastes and dispositions in common. And if we reflect how often enduring friendships, and even the love that leads to marriage and hallows it, begin in this merely outward attraction ; if we consider

how much the world owes to affections which we may class with animal instincts—to the maternal *storgē*, to the parental sense of responsibility, and to the filial response of dependence and obedience ; if we remember how much these affections do to promote the order, comfort, and happiness of those who never rise very high above the animal plane of existence, we shall admit a certain sacredness even in these friendly instincts and affections, although we cannot but confess that, till they grow into something nobler and better than themselves, they are pitifully precarious and unsure.

It is only, however, when at least “one party to the bond” rises consciously to a higher plane of life and breathes a moral atmosphere, that we get an illustration which will serve our turn. Conceive, then, two friends honestly attached to each other, though the one moves mainly along the animal plane of existence, while the other moves mainly along the ethical plane. The one is occupied for the most part with the things of outward life—with the appetites of the body, with the cares of business, with all that makes life warm, bright, and agreeable to those who hold by the world and the world’s law. The other cares more for wisdom than for wealth, for goodness than for comfort, for self-culture than for self-indulgence, for serving others than for pleasing himself. And yet there is a sincere liking, a true friendly love, between the two. Is this a friendship that will turn out happily, that will last ?

That depends almost entirely on the man who holds

the higher position of the two. As they cherish different ideals, pursue different aims, their paths must diverge, and it is inevitable that the bond between them should be strained ; for the one must be constantly saying or doing that which the other cannot approve, with which he cannot sympathize or can only imperfectly sympathize. They must chafe one another, therefore ; their friendship must be tried by strife and unrest. And the strain must fall most heavily on the man who occupies the lower plane of thought and action ; for he cannot see what it means and whence it springs. He will feel all the pain of it without being able to grasp and appreciate the true cause of the pain. But the other will understand it. He will see that, simply because they cherish different ideals of what life ought to be and pursue different ends, their fellowship is not and cannot be complete, that it must be broken by crossing interests and clashing aims. And if he is as much better as he is wiser than his friend, he will seek to make the fellowship complete by awakening a higher consciousness in the man he loves, by winning him to cherish higher and nobler ideals and purposes. If his love be as patient as it is sincere, if it prompt him both to labour and to wait, he will probably succeed ; for, after all, men have a natural affinity with that which is high and noble, if only it approach them with an aspect of grace. He will raise and gain his friend, and the two will rest in each other, and set themselves to each other like perfect music unto noble words.

Here, no doubt, we have the secret source from which

the strife and division of many an unhappy household spring. Here, too, the secret lifelong task to which many a good man, or woman, unhappily mated, have devoted themselves ; that, *viz.*, of raising their mate to their own higher level of thought and aim. But it is not to reach these secrets, nor to read a homily on the duties of a true friendship, that I have dwelt a little on what a genuine and friendly love involves. My aim has been, rather, to suggest how, despite our manifold weaknesses and faults, *Christ* may reckon us, with Lazarus, among his friends ; to indicate the secret of that unrest which leads us to doubt whether He is really our friend, and what the course which his friendship for us constrains Him to pursue. Equality, whether of station, character, or gifts, is not indispensable to friendship. There may be a true and growing love between those who, for the present, move on very different planes, between even the Highest and the lowest. If we have any intelligent appreciation of what He is seeking to make of us, and to do both for us and for the world at large, though as yet it may and even must be very imperfect ; if we have any sympathy, however partial and obstructed, with his redeeming, renewing, and restoring work, we are in a most true sense the friends of Christ, nay, of Almighty God Himself, provided only that we are sincerely striving to enter into that work more intelligently and to come into a closer sympathy with his purposes and aims. We often doubt his friendship for us simply because we have not fully grasped his ideal of human life and conduct, or because our

devotion to it is impaired by our cravings for present ease and gain, or because we are diverted from our pursuit of it by the toils, cares, and excitements of this present world. But can we suppose that either Lazarus, or the Twelve, even after Christ had acknowledged them to be his friends, were all that He wished them to be and meant to make them, that they fully understood Him and all He said to them, or that they were always faithful to what they did understand of his mind and will for them? If only our heart be set on knowing and following Him, if we crave and seek a growing likeness to Him and a growing obedience, we are truly his friends. And He is as good as He is wise, as patient as He is kind. He is far too much our friend to suffer us to fall away from Him, or to be content with our being anything short of the very best we are capable of becoming, or aiming at and living for any but the loftiest ideal. Hence it is—because He *is* our friend, and not because He is *not* our friend—that He checks us when we leave his way to wander in any lower path, disappoints our hopes when we pursue any inferior aim, stings us by the sense of his displeasure into unrest whenever we seek to repose in any but our true home, and is for ever urging us to new endeavours after a higher wisdom, a more sincere and complete goodness, a more sure and certain hope. In fine, as the whole discipline of our life springs from his love for us, so the end of that discipline is to bring us to a clearer and larger understanding of his ways, a keener and more enduring sympathy with the counsels and purposes of

his will ; to kindle and fan our love for Him by revealing his love for us.

If, then, delivered from all doubt and fear, we would be sure that Christ is our friend, let us make sure that we are his friends ; *i.e.*, let us cultivate that intelligent appreciation of his thoughts, and that quick-springing but stedfast sympathy with his purposes which, as we have seen, are the main elements of all true friendship, and which can hardly fail to induce in us a growing devotion to his will. For those are not his worst or least valued friends who shew their love, not in devotional effusions mainly, nor in cherishing ardent sentiments, nor in loud proclamations of their affection for Him, but by doing their daily duty for his sake, without much talk whether of their duty or of Him. Lazarus was, in a very special sense, his friend—a man whom He *claimed* for his friend. And yet Lazarus has not left us a single word, though we should have been so glad to hear what he had to say on the crowning experience of his life. He was content to do his Friend's will, even when to do it he had to recross the stream of death. And our Lord and Friend has Himself assured us : " Then are ye my friends, if ye *do* the things which I command you."

XXXIII.

THE DEATH OF EZEKIEL'S WIFE.

“And the people said unto me, Wilt thou not tell us what these things are to us, that thou doest so?”—EZEKIEL xxiv. 19.

A MAN cannot be a prophet without paying a heavy price for it ; and yet the very price he has to pay may make him rich. He must subordinate his private life, with its interests and affections, to his public duty ; but in the faithful discharge of public duty he may best nourish and cultivate his personal life. He must exhaust himself in many labours, endure many pains, make many sacrifices ; but these very labours, pains, sacrifices, are likely to prove his best training, and to raise him to a nobler stamp of excellence and a higher degree of usefulness than he could otherwise attain.

We all admit that no man can become perfect save by sufferings, and the use he makes of them. How can we doubt it when even the Best Man learned obedience and was made perfect by the things which He suffered ? And yet when we see a good man afflicted, and afflicted because or by means of his goodness, how prone we are to pity him, and to resent the wrongs by which he is

settled and established in righteousness! When the suffering by which we are made perfect falls on *us*, how apt we are to pity and bemoan ourselves, and to carry ourselves as if some strange thing had befallen us, something that we can hardly be expected to bear with patience, courage, hope! When those whom we love are called to pass through trials of loss and bereavement, how apt we are to commiserate them and condole with them on the very discipline which is intended for their perfection! how inapt to remind them that they are being summoned by the Divine Pity and Love to take the way of the Cross, to tread the path their Master took before them! Suffering makes perfect, we admit; and we long for *their* perfection: yet how we shrink from seeing them brought under the only discipline by which their perfection is to be secured!

Nevertheless, we have no true comfort for them till we can give them this high and noble comfort, till, with the accent of deep conviction, we can assure them that by the things which they suffer God is purging them from their faults and defects, calling them to a nearer approach, a closer fellowship with Himself, beseeching and constraining them to pursue the true and highest aims of life, teaching them to live for others rather than for themselves, and so helping them to become perfect even as He is perfect.

To all who are seeking "comfort to their grief," to all who would carry true comfort to their stricken neighbours, there is an incident in Ezekiel's history which speaks with a very penetrating and pregnant voice.

It was, he tells us, on the tenth day of the tenth month in the ninth year of his exile—a date he could never forget—that he lost the wife of his youth, a wife so tenderly and passionately loved that she is called “the desire of his eyes”—the choice phrase implying that in her person and character he found a loveliness so fresh and of such infinite variety that custom could not stale it to him, that he was always finding something new to admire in her and to love. “The desire of his eyes was taken away from him *at a stroke*,” the suddenness of his loss deepening his sense of loss, and oppressing him with an intolerable burden of grief. With the tidings of her death, moreover, there came a command which must have been inexpressibly bitter to him. He was not to mourn or weep, or let his tears run down. He was to “sigh in silence, and to make no mourning for the dead.” He was not to uncover his head and sprinkle ashes upon it, nor to put his shoes from off his feet, nor to cover his lips, after the manner of Eastern mourners ; nor was he to “eat the bread of men,” *i.e.*, the food which men sent to the house of mourning in token of sympathy with its bereaved inmates. All the common shows of sorrow and respect were to be omitted ; and he was to go about his ordinary tasks in his ordinary attire, as though no stroke had fallen on his breaking heart. To a man of his sensitive and poetic temperament the command must have seemed doubly hard. Yet he had grace to obey it ; and there is all the force of deep passion well repressed and controlled in the strong simple words in which he describes his obedience (Verse 18): “So I spake

unto the people in the morning ; and at even my wife died : and I did in the morning as I was commanded."

How *could* he do it ? we ask in amazement, quite forgetting that our question should rather be, How could he do otherwise ? For, first of all, he had been in close and intimate fellowship with God for many years, and therefore knew that God's will is always pure and kind, however cruel it may seem. And, then, the word which forewarned him of his wife's death was not the only word that came to him from God that day. It had been preceded by another word which bade him take note of the time, since, on this very day, the King of Babylon was gathering his forces for a final and victorious assault upon Jerusalem. *Before* he had been forbidden to mourn his private loss, he had been commanded to tell his fellow captives on the banks of the Chebar, in a parable, of the doom which was even then falling on that wicked and devoted city ; to tell them how all the limbs of the body politic, the commonwealth of Judah, were to be tossed as into a great caldron, under which a great fire, a mighty pile, was to be kindled, so mighty and so fierce that the very brass of the caldron should be melted and its whole contents consumed (Verses 6-14). So guilty were the people who called themselves the people of the Lord, so filthy and ingrained were their vices and stains, that in no other way, by no form of discipline less penetrating, could the work of their purification be accomplished. The anger of the Lord must do its strange work upon them before his love and mercy could find room to act, and quicken

a new life in those who were dead in trespasses and sins. And, with this terrible public calamity overhanging him, how could any man of public spirit be at leisure to bemoan his private losses and griefs? So, in the morning Ezekiel spake these dreadful tidings to the exiles among whom he dwelt; at even his wife died: and on the next morning they saw him walking among them in his usual habit, asking no sympathy, wearing no sign of the eating sorrow that was preying on his heart.

And they were astonished, as well they might be; for they knew how deeply and fondly he had loved the wife whom he had lost. In their astonishment they gathered round him and said, "Wilt thou not tell us what these things are *to us*, that thou doest so?" They quite understood that his strange carriage, his stern self-suppression, had a meaning for them, that it was "a sign" such as the Prophets were wont to weave out of the incidents of their personal life; that he was doing what he did for their sakes, not for his own. But they could not see how it bore on them, what meaning it carried for them. For they, too, like their brethren in Jerusalem, had lost that quick understanding which springs from the fear of the Lord. They liked to hear Ezekiel recite his parables and visions. They were charmed with his eloquence, his lofty poetic flights: now and then they were even moved by his moral fervour, his indignation against their sins, and the warmth and earnestness of his invitations to a new and better life. But, after all, his high prophetic strain was little more, and he knew that it was little more, to them than "a very lovely song

of one that had a pleasant voice, and could play well on an instrument" (Chap. xxxiii. 32). They *heard* his words, but they *did* them not. Nay, they heard his words, but they attached little weight, little meaning, to them. That parable of his which they had heard the morning before, the parable of the Boiling Caldron, was very fine, and had probably impressed them by its tragic power. But they had not caught its burden, or they had not understood that the catastrophe which it shadowed forth was even then falling on the city of their fathers, on the kinsfolk, the sons and daughters, they had left behind them in Jerusalem.

And hence Ezekiel was commanded to do precisely what they were doing, to carry himself under his dreadful private loss as though he had lost nothing, just as they were carrying themselves as though the destruction of the Holy City were no loss to them. Seeing him apparently unconcerned, they opened on him with loud amazement. What could he mean? Why did he, who had loved his wife so well, shew no sign of grief now that the desire of his eyes had been taken from him at a stroke? They felt that he must have some purpose, some prophetic intention, in it : but what was it? And when they ask, "Wilt thou not tell us what these things are to us, that thou doest *so*?" he is ready with his reply. "They are this to you. A great public calamity is hanging over us all. It is *our* city that has been besieged, *our* kinsfolk who are perishing. However little you believe or feel it, the kingdom of Judah, the national honour, our very existence as a nation, has

been taken away from you at a stroke, even as my wife has been taken from me. It is *your* kinsfolk that have been cut off, *your* glory which has passed away. And when once the truth is brought home to you, you also will find all your personal griefs swallowed up in the misery and shame of this national disaster. Instead of mourning even for the kinsfolk and children you have lost, you will mourn rather for that Holy Sanctuary and Palladium, the pomp of your strength, the desire of *your* eyes, that for which your soul longeth (Verse 21), and weep and pine away for the iniquity which has brought so terrible a doom upon it."

And now it is easy to see the mercy hidden in that cruel-looking command, "Sigh in silence, make no mourning for the dead." It was a command to live for others rather than for himself—as a prophet was bound to do. It was a command to subordinate his personal interests and affections to the public good—as a prophet was also bound to do. Nor was it simply a summons to be true to his vocation: it was also a most merciful provision for his comfort. For what *can* bring men comfort in their private griefs if not a call to public usefulness, a faithful discharge of disinterested duty, and the resolve to live for no personal ends, but for the common weal?

There is no better, as there is no nobler way of comfort than this—as more than one well-known man of our own times has found. No one who has once heard it can well forget the story which John Bright has told us of himself: how he was found sitting in his darkened house,

brooding with a breaking heart over the irreparable loss he had sustained in the sudden death of the wife of his youth—found by Cobden, and urged to take part in the great enterprise of bringing bread to the hungry and the poor ; and how, as he devoted himself to this public task, new interests sprang up in his wasted life, and in some good though gradual measure consoled him for his private grief. Did not *he* take the high heroic path to comfort which Ezekiel trod before him, and learn to live for others rather than for himself? Whatever we may think of him as a politician, can we fail to admire him as a man, or, at lowest, to admire the devotion to public ends by which he was thus inspired and consoled?

Another illustration may serve to suggest in how many different ways the example of Ezekiel may be followed, and a great gain be plucked from the heart of loss. Few men, I suppose, have felt a loss more keenly than Alfred Tennyson felt the loss of Arthur Hallam. The greatest living master of the English tongue,¹ he could find no words to express a tithe of his grief. How did he get comfort for his sorrow? Not by brooding over his personal loss, his private grief, simply ; but by pondering all the moods of grief which a loss like his inspires in Christian souls, and by searching out all the medicinal and consolatory thoughts by which the various phases of their grief might be assuaged.

¹ It may prevent a misconstruction if I say that this Discourse, as indeed the whole Volume, was in the Publisher's hands before I had so much as thought of dedicating it to Baron Tennyson, or had heard from him that he would accept the dedication.

His great poem, *In Memoriam*, is not simply a costly and elaborate sepulchre in which Tennyson at once buried and hallowed his personal grief, or a stately shrine consecrated to the memory of his friend ; it is also a scripture of comfort in which ten thousand times ten thousand have already found consolation in their darkest hours, and from which a company no man can number have caught their first glimpse of "the larger hope," the hope that "somehow good will be the final goal of ill," and "every winter change to spring," and every spring swell into an eternal summer of the soul. Has not *his* loss been transmuted into gain, not for himself alone, but for all whom he has taught to "stretch a hand through time and catch the far-off interest of tears"? Has not his sorrow, according to the gracious Divine promise, been turned into joy, and a joy which unborn myriads will share with us and with him?

But these great examples may seem beyond our reach. *We* have not the secret of the Poet's alchemy, which transmutes dross into gold. *We* do not wield an eloquence which would compel an unwilling Senate to listen to our words, and to repeal laws which it is to their interest, or which they deem it to be to their interest, to maintain. *We* are vouchsafed no visions from the excellent glory by which we may be lifted out of ourselves, and the narrow circle of our personal interests and emotions, and moved to a single-hearted devotion to the service of truth and righteousness. How, then, we may ask, can we be expected to follow the example

and tread in the steps of the Poet, the Statesman, and the Prophet?

That is to say, we may be foolish enough to ask, How can we be expected to follow the example of the very men whom God has sent to be our examples, and who are raised above us by their character and gifts that we may see them the more clearly and follow them the more closely? It is to ask, How can we be expected to obey the Christian law, and love others better than ourselves? It is to ask, How can we be expected to take and keep the one path which will conduct us to a true and noble comfort? And to ask such questions as these is to adjudge ourselves unworthy of the Christian name.

Nay, more: it is to ask questions the answer to which is close at hand, in our mouths, our memories, our hearts. For to which of us is it impossible, however few or poor our gifts may be, to consider, when we are sorrowful, what is the best use we can make of our sorrow, how we may turn it to the best account, how we may convert it into an inspiring force which shall constrain us to aim higher, to live a less worldly and selfish life, and be more ready to respond, if not to great public claims, at least to the wants and claims of our immediate neighbours? Which of us has not known men and women of no higher place and no more eminent gifts than our own whom defeated love, or disappointed hopes, or the stroke of bereavement, have led to devote themselves to the service of others, either in their own homes and among their own kin, or in the charitable organizations which

minister to the necessities of the poor and wretched around them? Have we not all known those whom sorrow has raised to a better higher life, making them more thoughtful, more helpful, more kind and devout? And have we not *seen* them find strength and consolation as they thus turned their grief to use, their spirits rising as their aims rose, their hearts growing pure and serenely glad as they grew larger, as more and more of their neighbours found a shelter and an asylum in them?

Our answer is plain, then. Ezekiel's high way of comfort is a true way of comfort. It is *not* impossible for any one of us, not too high for human nature's daily use. And, happily, many of us betake ourselves to it instinctively, unconsciously; not because we are seeking comfort in it by direct intention, but because it is a relief to our misery to help the miserable, because our grief brings us into fellowship with all who grieve, because our restlessness makes us eager for labour and for service, because we are driven by loss of earthly stay to seek a heavenly succour and support.

Many of you can bear me witness that you have thus found in loss itself a gain to match, that your care for others has lessened your own care, that in public service you have found the best antidote of your private grief, that bereavement itself has either brought you a new impulse to a better life, or has made your endeavours after that life more steadfast and more commanding. And hence you can join with me in assuring all who are this day mourning a loss like yours that they too will find their best comfort in turning to God and the service

of God with a more perfect heart ; that by serving Him, in serving their neighbours, they will gain strength to bear their private load ; that in a more unworldly and unselfish life, and a heart more open to the wants and miseries of their fellows, they will find the truest solace of their grief.

To as many, then, as turn to God, in the agony of some sharp and sudden stroke, with the question, "Wilt Thou not tell us what these things are to us, that Thou doest so?" the answer comes clear and distinct: "By all these things men *live*, and in all these there is life *for the spirit*."

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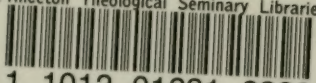
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